

# Huskers Illustrated



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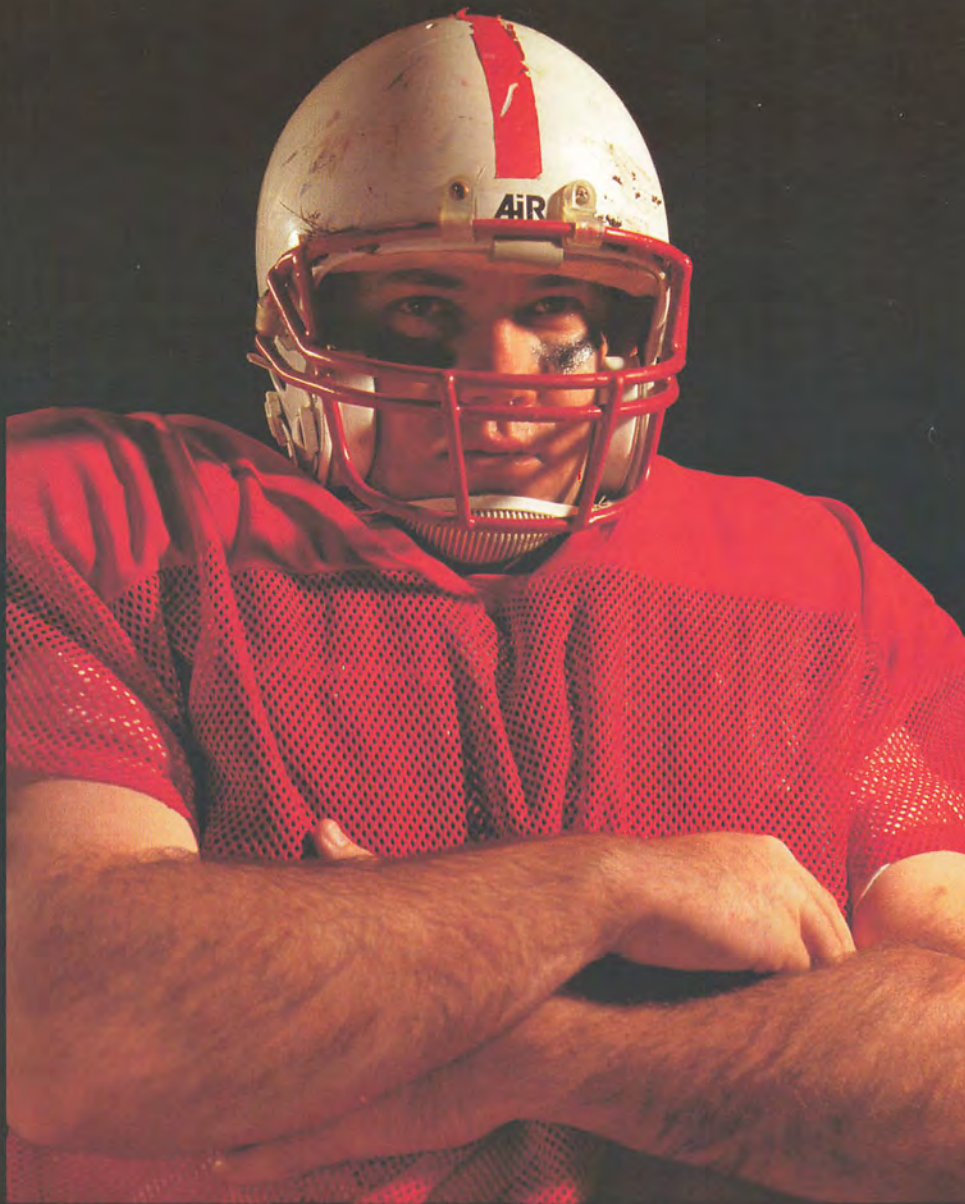
## Big Red's Big Romp 66-17

**Looking Ahead:**  
Dominic Raiola's early  
departure adds to questions  
entering 2001 season





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## No Time To Celebrate

*All-American Raiola's early departure adds to challenge facing Huskers in 2001*



**Brian Hill**

SO MUCH for a quiet off-season.

Five days after the 66-17 demolition of Big 10 Conference tri-champion Northwestern in the Alamo Bowl, All-American center Dominic Raiola announced that he was leaving early to enter the NFL Draft.

That same day, quarterback Eric Crouch underwent successful arthroscopic surgery on his throwing shoulder.

Although Crouch will miss spring practice for the second straight year, he is expected back at full speed in the fall. That's the good news for Husker fans.

The bad news is the departure of Raiola, who said before the holidays that he planned to return for his senior season. His change of heart leaves the Huskers with just two returning starters in the offensive line — tackle Dave Volk, who will be a senior, and guard Toniui Fonoti, who will be a junior in the fall.

When a top player moves on or is injured, the Nebraska system always seems to find a quality replacement to step in and step up. That will be especially important at the center position, where Raiola has started 25 straight games.

Jon Rutherford, the offensive line's "sixth man" until suffering a season-ending knee injury in the Kansas game, would be the favorite to replace Raiola, but he also will miss spring drills while recovering from surgery.

That will leave Matt Shook and deep snapper John Garrison to likely make the majority of the snaps when spring workouts begin March 19. And maybe, by the time the Spring Game rolls around April 14, someone else will have emerged.

Fonoti, who set a season record for

pancake blocks, and linebacker Randy Stella are the subjects of "Looking Ahead," a pair of stories by contributing editor Mike Babcock looking ahead to the 2001 season.

Raiola's departure leaves the Huskers with starters returning at just four positions on offense, compared to 10 entering the 2000 season.

That means Nebraska will not be rated nearly as high entering next season as they were in 2000. It seems likely the Huskers will begin the 2001 season about where they finished — seventh in the coaches' poll and eighth in the AP rankings.

After falling short against Oklahoma and Kansas State and barely getting by Colorado, the Huskers again looked like a top-five team in the Alamo Bowl romp.

That outcome may be deceiving.

Northwestern did share the Big 10 title with Purdue and Michigan and entered the game 3-2 against ranked teams. But it obviously wasn't a banner year for the conference, whose highest rated team — Michigan — finished 10th in the coaches' poll. And Big Ten teams were 2-4 in bowl games.

The Big 12, meanwhile, went 4-3 in bowl games and had

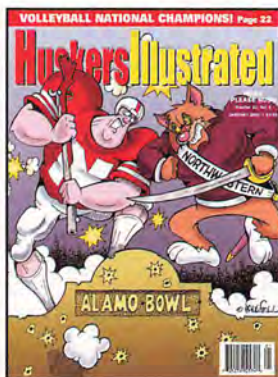
three teams among the top eight in the final AP ratings, led by national champion Oklahoma, and five in the top 25.

The 5-year-old Big 12 Conference continues to get better and better and gain prestige nationally. That's a good thing.

Nebraska's record-setting bowl performance can be a nice springboard into next season, but getting back to the top certainly won't be easy.

Signing day for the Class of 2001 is Feb. 7, and spring practice starts just more than a month later.

Is there really an off-season? ■



### ON THE COVER

I-back Dan Alexander rambles for part of his 240 yards in the Alamo Bowl. Photo by Scott Bruhn

### Got Something To Say?

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# Huskers Illustrated CONTENTS

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## 17 Alamo Bowl

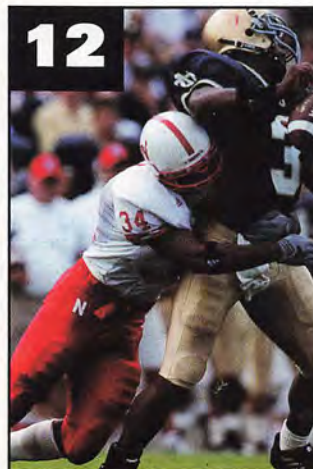
Nebraska broke 12 Alamo Bowl records in overwhelming Big 10 Conference tri-champion Northwestern 66-17. *By Mike Babcock*

## NEXT ISSUE

The March (Recruiting) issue will be mailed Feb. 19.

## DEPARTMENTS

<b>Letter From The Editor</b> .....	4
<b>NU Notebook</b> .....	6
<i>True freshman rush end Benard Thomas gained valuable experience after being pulled out of a redshirt year.</i>	
<b>Quick Hits</b> .....	7
<i>After winning a school-record 51 games, the NU baseball team is rated fourth and fifth in the preseason ratings.</i>	
<b>State Of The Huskers</b> .....	8
<i>A knee injury in the bowl game adds to the challenge as wingback John Gibson tries to get a sixth year.</i>	
<b>From The West</b> .....	10
<i>Seniors Kyle Vanden Bosch and Bobby Newcombe may have saved their best performances for last.</i>	
<b>From The Beat</b> .....	11
<i>All the talk was about Northwestern being ready to pull a stunning upset. It didn't happen.</i>	
<b>Alamo Bowl Recap</b> .....	17
<b>4th and Inches</b> .....	21
<b>Alamo Bowl Statistics</b> .....	22
<b>The First 1</b> .....	24
<i>Linebacker Jerry Murtaugh's career tackles mark has stood the test of time.</i>	
<b>Hoops</b> .....	26
<i>Wilson Thomas, the heir apparent to Matt Davison at split end, is giving basketball a shot this winter.</i>	
<b>Side Out</b> .....	28
<i>What's next for the national champions?</i>	
<b>Grid Recruiting</b> .....	32
<i>The month of December was kind to the Huskers, who added six commitments.</i>	
<b>Crossword Puzzle, Huskernutz</b> .....	36
<b>Final Word</b> .....	38
<i>Even lobbying from quarterback Eric Crouch couldn't keep center Dominic Raiola from leaving early for the NFL Draft.</i>	



## 12 Looking Ahead

Linebacker Randy Stella and offensive guard Toniui Fonoti are two Huskers who are expected to produce big things in 2001. *By Mike Babcock*



# Valuable Experience

Through much of the season, freshman rush end Benard Thomas declined reporters' requests for interviews, indicating that he preferred to wait until he had earned a Blackshirt.

His silence might be evidence of his focus. Rush ends coach Nelson Barnes acknowledged that Thomas was focused during his first collegiate season. But Barnes refused to draw a correlation between the two. "I can't translate anything for somebody else," Barnes said of Thomas's unwillingness to be interviewed. "If that's what you want to write, don't put my name behind it."

"When I hear players say that, it means nothing to me. I don't even give it a second thought. It doesn't mean good. It doesn't mean bad. If that's what he decided to do, it's fine with me."

Barnes' concern was Thomas's performance on the field. And he was satisfied with that.

The 6-foot-4, 240-pound Thomas is "a very talented young man, and he has a chance to be a very good football player," said Barnes. "He's really starting to grasp the system. And once he grasps it completely, he'll be able to play with his athleticism and let it really show."

Thomas's talents were sufficient that he was pulled out of a redshirt after the second game. He was among four true freshmen who played for the Cornhuskers this season. The others were defensive backs Willie Amos and Terrell Butler and strongside linebacker T.J. Hollowell.

Thomas gained valuable experience, despite getting sick "in the middle of the year" and missing two games, according to Barnes. He played in six games total, often at crucial times. "He got in a lot of games early, in the first quarter, before the games were decided," Barnes said.

"He was put out there when the game was on the line."

In that sense, Thomas's experience probably was more valuable than the experience departing senior Kyle Vanden Bosch gained as a true freshman on the 1997 national championship team.

"Kyle may have played a few more snaps when he was a true freshman, but Kyle never played when the game was on the line," said Barnes. "Every game that Kyle played in his freshman year was already decided by the time he got



**Nelson Barnes**

in. We had three very talented guys that were playing."

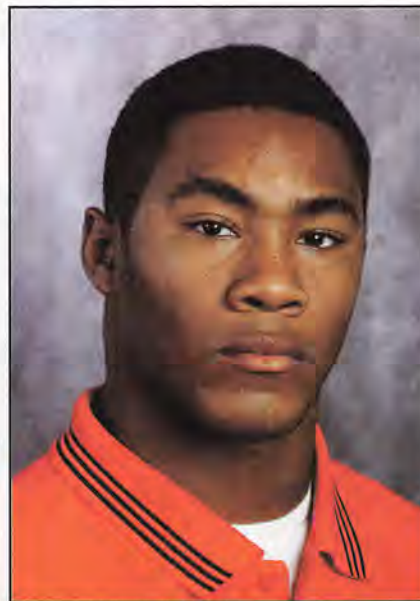
The Cornhuskers' rush ends in 1997 included Grant Wistrom, Mike Rucker and Chad Kelsay. With those three and some solid back-ups, there was little opportunity for Vanden Bosch.

Even so, he gained valuable experience as a true freshman, according to Barnes.

"Every team was trailing us when Kyle got in, so it wasn't under the same type of pressure," Barnes said. "But the fact that he got in and got the feel of the game really helped him down the road."

The left rush end position was less settled than the right end this season, simply because the players competing for time there — Chris Kelsay, Demoiné Adams and Justin Smith — were inexperienced.

But all three will return as juniors, along with senior-to-be J.P. Wichmann, who was Vanden Bosch's back-up. Add Thomas and junior-to-be Kyle Ringenberg and there should be some spirited competition at both positions during spring practice. With the exception of Ringenberg, a walk-on from Elkhorn, Neb., they all know "what it's



**Benard Thomas**

like to be in a game when it's on the line," Barnes said.

Kelsay got off to a slow start because of, among other things, missing spring practice as a result of athletic pubalgia. "And when he first came into (fall) camp, we felt like he had a bout with mono," said Barnes. But Kelsay finished strong, starting from the fifth game on.

He was credited with 29 tackles, including two for losses and a half-sack. He also broke up three passes, had nine quarterback hurries (third on the team) and forced a fumble.

"I'd really like to think that Chris Kelsay made tremendous progress," said Barnes. "I was really hoping that he would step in and kind of do some of the things he's done."

"I feel very confident about him going into next year as a proven player."

Adams was the starter on the left side for the first four games and gained an understanding of "what it's going to take," Barnes said. "I expect both of those guys to have a grasp."

He also expects Wichmann to have a good grasp of the system.

Wichmann was credited with nine tackles, including two sacks for 12 yards in losses. "I've been very pleased with him," said Barnes. "I expect to see him continue to improve."

"And I expect him to play a lot more next year, a whole lot more."

Thomas figures to play a whole lot more as well. He has come a long way in short time. "For all freshmen, it's an adjustment," Barnes said. "He didn't play defensive end in high school like we do, so it was a bit of a change. But he has done well picking up things."

And as is always the case, actions speak louder than words. ■



**Jeremy Slechta**

## SLECHTA INJURES FINGER

Cornhusker defensive tackle Jeremy Slechta underwent three hours of surgery on his right index finger in early January, after suffering bone and tendon damage when the finger was crushed between a workbench and a pickup truck's front cattle guard. The accident occurred in Pender, Neb.

"His spirits are good, and they improved when doctors said there should be no reason he won't be ready for spring ball," Slechta's mother, Alice, told the Lincoln Journal Star. ■



## IT'S ALL ACADEMIC

Senior rush end Kyle Vanden Bosch received the Vincent dePaul Draddy Award as college football's top scholar-athlete at a banquet in New York City in mid-December.

Vanden Bosch also received a finance degree in December. He finished the degree in three-and-a-half years, with a 3.82 cumulative grade-point average (on a 4.0 scale). He has earned \$43,000 in post-graduate scholarship money, including the \$25,000 that goes with the Draddy Award.



Vanden Bosch

Rob Zatechka was Nebraska's first Draddy Award winner, in 1994.

"That's an outstanding achievement for Kyle, and we're very pleased," said Cornhusker defensive coordinator Craig Bohl. "We feel that he represents this state in a fine fashion, and he continues that long tradition we've had here in coming great athletics with great academics."

Vanden Bosch refused to check the large trophy he received on the flight home. "They wanted me to check it in baggage, but I wouldn't do that," he said. "I pushed it under the seat."

Vanden Bosch also earned Academic All-America honors for a second consecutive season.

Former Cornhusker Johnny Rodgers, Nebraska's first Heisman Trophy winner in 1972, was inducted in the College Football Hall of Fame at the banquet at the Waldorf-Astoria.

Rodgers was among 14 Hall of Fame inductees, and received a plaque and ring. The Hall's Class of 2000 will be officially enshrined in South Bend, Ind., in August.

## SHARED HONOR

Middle linebacker Carlos Polk was named to the Associated Press All-America first team, an honor he was quick to share. "I couldn't have done it alone," he said. "I'll always remember how my teammates helped me . . . they were the ones getting double-teamed, leaving me free to make the tackle or a big play. I'm pleased to get this award, but it's important not to forget how I got it."

Junior center Dominic Raiola also was an AP first-team selection, while junior tight end Tracey Wistrom was included on the AP All-America third team.

## GILL DRAWS MIZZOU INTEREST

Cornhusker quarterbacks coach Turner Gill was among those Missouri Athletic Director Mike Alden interviewed to replace Larry Smith as the Tigers' head coach.

"We haven't had a lot of coaches leave, but to say it's not going to happen is not right for anybody," said Coach Frank Solich. "At some point in time, you're probably going to lose a few."

Nebraska did not lose Gill, however. Missouri hired Toledo's Gary Pinkel. ■

# QUICK HITS

## What's Happening In Nebraska Athletics?

### THEY'RE NO. 4 (OR 5)

The Nebraska baseball team's success last season earned it a No. 4 national ranking in the Collegiate Baseball preseason rankings, behind Georgia Tech, Southern California and Louisiana State.

"It's pretty amazing we're that high," Coach Dave Van Horn told the Lincoln Journal Star. "It's exciting for the program, but we know rankings don't mean anything."

"Now we have the bull's eye on our chest."

LSU is the defending national champion.

The Cornhuskers were one victory short of the first trip to the College World Series in school history last season, winning a school-record 51 games. They won a second consecutive Big 12 Tournament title, an NCAA regional title and were ranked 11th in the final Collegiate Baseball poll.

Van Horn's team is scheduled to open the season against No. 7-ranked Rice in the Rice Invitational at Houston on Feb. 9. The Cornhuskers also are slated to play No. 1 Georgia Tech.

The Collegiate Baseball preseason top 10:

- |                        |                    |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Georgia Tech        | 6. Arizona State   |
| 2. Southern California | 7. Rice            |
| 3. Louisiana State     | 8. Florida State   |
| 4. Nebraska            | 9. Miami, Fla.     |
| 5. Clemson             | 10. South Carolina |

Nebraska was No. 5 in the Baseball America preseason rankings, behind Georgia Tech, Southern California, Louisiana State and Miami, Fla.

### RECRUITING RECEIVERS

The Nebraska football team led the nation in rushing this season, averaging 349.3 yards per game on the ground. The NCAA rushing title was the Cornhuskers' 12th since 1980 and their 14th all-time.

Such numbers make recruiting receivers difficult. But Ron Brown is undaunted. "People will tell you if you come to Nebraska, you'll never have an opportunity at the next level," the receivers coach said. "I say, 'Look, we've had about 25 receivers in the last 13 years sign with pro football teams.'"

Brown also reminds prospective receiver recruits that former Cornhusker wingback Irving Fryar was the first player selected in the 1984 NFL draft. Even though Nebraska threw an average of only 16 passes per game in 1983, Fryar caught 40 passes for 780 yards and eight touchdowns.

"So you can have a big-time career here as a receiver," said Brown.

He's straightforward with recruits. "You've got to do the very best job of maximizing of what you have here," he said. "You can't create something that isn't there because then you're lying, you're fabricating, and kids see through that. I think you have to really be honest with them."

In addition to emphasizing Nebraska's commitment to the run, opposing schools try to dissuade recruits by pointing out the opportunity afforded walk-ons by the Cornhuskers.

They tell recruits "you'll be sitting down for the next four years and then the fifth year you might get a chance," Brown said. "The facts are — just the facts, mam — we have a number of true freshmen that play. I think a lot of that has to do with the NFL draft, coming in and getting kids early."

That means more opportunity for young players, whatever their position.

Nebraska doesn't make promises of playing time to recruits, according to Brown. "I've never promised a guy one down of playing time . . . (to) Johnny Mitchell, Matt Davison, Tracey Wistrom, any of those guys," he said. "But you will get an opportunity. That's the thing you try to get across."

Obviously, weather also is a factor in recruiting receivers, and players at all positions. Several recruits visited Nebraska during an unusual cold snap, with heavy snow, just before the team left Lincoln for San Antonio, Texas, to begin preparing for the Alamo Bowl game.

"I went over the weather patterns with them," said Brown. "I tried to explain to them, 'Hey, our coldest game last year was the Fiesta Bowl. We averaged 70 degrees per game. The year before that was pretty good. And this year, we had only one snow game. That was at Kansas State.' I said, 'You seldom, if ever, have to play in weather like this. This is rather extreme, even for Nebraska.'"

### LOOS LOST

Redshirted freshman offensive tackle Chris Loos suffered ligament damage in his left knee during practice prior to Nebraska's departure for the Alamo Bowl and will miss spring practice.

Loos had been the top back-up on the left side after Jon Rutherford was sidelined by injury in November, so "he's got an awful lot of reps with us this year," Coach Frank Solich said. ■



## Comebacks Nothing New

*Knee injury in bowl game adds to challenge  
as wingback Gibson tries for extra year*



**Mike  
BABCOCK**

JOHN GIBSON STOOD on the perimeter of the on-field celebration that followed Nebraska's 66-17 victory against Northwestern in the Alamo Bowl game, propped up by crutches.

Less than 7 minutes into the game, he had suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee. The injury occurred as he changed direction on a downfield block.

He was a solitary figure. The image was in stark contrast to one following the Cornhuskers' final practice in Lincoln before heading to San Antonio to begin bowl preparations.

Seniors had been excused from running wind sprints. Gibson was among those who didn't run, despite the protestations of some of his teammates, particularly the wide receivers. He should be running with them, they claimed. But, he responded with a laugh, "I'm not running, am I?"

Gibson was a senior, of course. And like the Cornhuskers' 26 other seniors, his career may have ended with the Alamo Bowl game. So he was justified in skipping the sprints.

On the other hand, he had already begun the process of petitioning the NCAA for a sixth season of eligibility, which meant if he were to be successful, he would be back in 2001.

And since his chances of getting an additional season seem good, he probably should have done the running. So "we'll make it retroactive in the spring," said receivers coach Ron Brown. The issue might not be resolved by spring practice, Gibson replied.

And even if it is, recovery from the knee injury will keep him on the sideline now.

But no one could have known that day in late December.

This would have been the "eighth spring ball of your career," Wilson Thomas said as he prepared to sprint from one side of the Cook Pavilion to the other and back.

Thomas, a sophomore split end, was exaggerating. If Gibson is granted a sixth season of eligibility in time, the spring practice would have been only the fifth of his career.

But "I don't have it yet," he reminded Thomas and the others.

"Even if you think you've got a 99 percent chance, there's still that 1 percent chance something goes wrong or something doesn't go through. So I'm not going to get too excited."

The NCAA allows athletes to petition for a sixth season when injuries have sidelined them for the majority of two or more of their allotted five seasons of eligibility.

Offensive tackle Jason Schwab and punter Dan Hadenfeldt both played this season after being granted additional eligibility because of injuries their first two years at Nebraska.

Gibson's case is similarly solid. "It (the rule) should be in place for someone like that because it's obvious his career was greatly affected by two seasons of injuries," Brown said.

Nebraska hadn't made the decision to redshirt Gibson as

a true freshman until he suffered a shoulder injury that required arthroscopic surgery and he played in only the opener against Akron as a redshirted freshman in 1997 before suffering a season-ending knee injury during a scrimmage.

He caught two passes in the Akron game and "everything looked on the up-and-up," said Gibson, who played both wingback and split end this season. "Then the freak accident."

A pass was thrown behind him and he planted his right foot in order to turn and make the catch. "I guess the bottom half of my leg didn't agree with the top half," he said.

"They went their separate ways, and the ACL tore."

The low point of his Cornhusker career occurred after the surgery. Nebraska won the coaches' national championship that season, but Gibson couldn't feel a part of it.

"I wouldn't even wear my rings," he said. "A lot of people asked, 'How come you don't wear your rings?' I said, 'Well, I got hurt. I don't feel I contributed to winning that championship.' A lot of people may look at it differently, but I felt if I wasn't out there competing, I wasn't a part of it."

"Myself, I didn't think I deserved to wear the rings."

What had been a promising career threatened to become an undistinguished one because of the injuries. "I felt that you could just see the gleam in his eyes was gone," Brown said. "You wondered how confident he was. You wondered if he wasn't just trying to get through."

"I think it always meant a lot to him, but he just had so many things that had compounded on him. I think he let it get him down. Then this year he went after it like gangbusters."

Though he caught only eight passes for 41 yards and a touchdown against Texas Tech, Gibson was among the team's most reliable and consistent wide receivers. There was much talk about the need to get Bobby Newcombe more "touches," but Gibson might have had the greater claim.

Even though he had lived in the same house as Hadenfeldt when Hadenfeldt went through the process, Gibson didn't seriously consider petitioning for a sixth season until after the Colorado game.

Some of young receivers had dropped passes during practice, and "I was joking with Coach Solich. 'If this keeps up, I'm going to have to come back for my sixth year,'" he said.

"Coach Solich said, 'You can look into it.' And it started from there."

The first step was to get the Big 12 Conference to declare his first two seasons medical redshirts. Then he had to submit his request along with doctors' statements to the NCAA.

The knee injury in the Alamo Bowl game didn't diminish Gibson's resolve.

His return definitely would be a big boost for Nebraska. "He'll help this football team in a big way if he comes back," Brown said. "The Lord willing, that will happen." ■



**John Gibson caught 8  
passes for 41 yards and  
a touchdown.**



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# A Pair Of Aces

**Nebraska puts all its cards on the table  
as seniors Vanden Bosch, Newcombe make history**



**Bob  
SCHALLER**

KYLE VANDEN BOSCH stood on the field, trying to soak in everything that had transpired.

Moments later, deep in the bowels of the Alamodome, Frank Solich stood in the back of the interview room, as Bobby Newcombe spoke after Nebraska's let's-take-it-out-behind-the-barn whipping of Northwestern.

"I leave here more mature, and I'll be better off for what I went through,"

Newcombe said. "I will turn it into positives,"

Solich looked down, and allowed himself a small, barely noticeable, smile. That moment is where higher education, athletics and the relationship between a coach and his player are at their absolute best.

"Good job, Bobby," Solich said as headed to the front of the room. "I'm proud of you."

"Thanks coach," Newcombe said as the two shook hands.

Newcombe's final hour might have been his finest, and the mercurial Bobby Newcombe gave fans — in his final game as a Husker — a few more memories.

"I had my final game at Nebraska and was able to play a good game," Newcombe said. "Everyone wants to go out a winner."

Newcombe did. Big time.

The most surprising was Newcombe's half-back touchdown pass to Matt Davison, a tight spiral Newcombe lofted that went for a 69-yard touchdown with just more than a minute remaining in the third quarter.

"That's something we practiced for four years," Newcombe said. "Matt and I were joking on the sideline, before that play, that I shouldn't under throw it."

The one-time option quarterback — the heir apparent to Scott Frost and the most talked about Nebraska quarterback next to Tommie Frazier, to whom Newcombe was often compared early on — set up a touchdown with a can-you-believe-your-eyes burst of speed down the Husker sidelines. He ended up with a 32-yard punt return to the Northwestern 8-yard line. Less than a minute later, Correll Buckhalter scored to put Nebraska ahead 28-10.

But that wasn't even Newcombe's best highlight in Saturday night's Alamo Bowl.

Or even, for that matter, his best highlight in the second quarter.

With Northwestern feeling pretty good after answering a Nebraska scored with a 69-yard touchdown run of its own to close the gap to 31-17 with under a minute left in the half, Nebraska went back to work.

Well, Newcombe went back to work.

On second down and four from the Husker 42-yard line, and with 20 seconds left in the half, quarterback Eric Crouch

flipped a short screen pass to Newcombe.

But it wasn't short for long.

Newcombe dashed down the sideline. He got the only block he needed — thrown by wide receiver Wilson Thomas on Northwestern's Raheem Covington — and outran the only other two Wildcat defenders who had a shot at him.

"When I first caught it, I thought I was going nowhere," Newcombe said. "But Wilson threw that great block. And then, it was history."

The best kind. For all to remember. And who had a more memorable bowl performance on defense than Vanden Bosch?

Like Newcombe, Vanden Bosch had a night to remember. He had been maligned — unfairly, especially by those who don't understand football — often during the season.

Maybe the planets were lined up just right.

Perhaps the biorhythms — whatever those are — were in sync.

Or, more likely, Vanden Bosch is just one heck of a player.

"Our coaches just put us in a position to make plays," Vanden Bosch said with a shrug.

In the first quarter, moments after showing Vanden Bosch on TV noting that he had won a national award for the outstanding student-athlete, Vanden Bosch put on a clinic.

"We were angry, because they were playing dirty, doing things to try and hurt us ... things we don't do," Vanden Bosch said. "We let our play do the talking."

The senior rush end took Northwestern's most publicized offensive line standout, Leon Brockmeier, and slapped him around for a while. Vanden Bosch blew by the All-Big 10 tackle like Brockmeier was standing still.

"I don't know if this really was my best game," Vanden Bosch said. "But it was pretty good."

On one play in the first half, Vanden Bosch was so close to Northwestern quarterback Zak Kustok that Vanden Bosch was able to knock down Kustok's pass and knock the quarterback to the ground in the same motion.

"The coaches told us we could get to him," Vanden Bosch said. "They were right."

He also got to Kustok for a sack later in the first half. This was vintage Vanden Bosch, in his last game as a Husker, before he heads to the NFL to become the next Grant Wistrom or Jared Tomich.

Most Nebraskans knew Bobby Newcombe and Kyle Vanden Bosch were winners a long time ago, regardless of what this team did — or didn't — accomplish this year.

Now, the rest of the country knows it as well. ■



**Bobby Newcombe  
scored a touchdown  
and passed for another.**

**Bob Schaller** covers the Huskers for the North Platte Telegraph and Scottsbluff Star-Herald. He can be reached at [schallerrc@aol.com](mailto:schallerrc@aol.com).



## Finishing In Style

*Huskers had that gleam in their eyes coming out of the locker room*



**Curt McKEEVER**

IT WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE New Year's Eve, but Nebraska came to the Alamo Bowl dressed to the nines and put on a party-stopping performance to match.

Now folks, that ain't an easy act to pull off.

Sure, San Antonio's a great place to be at the end of December, but let's face it — the pulse of the college football postseason doesn't start racing until Dick Clark ushers in the first toast of the year.

Well, the last one before the big ball dropped left Big Red faithful licking their lips.

Before the Huskers' pasting of Northwestern, you could pretty much figure the only way they would make fans across the nation come out of their slumber while anticipating the next tier of games is to have a major implosion against the Wildcats.

Perhaps, Frank Solich's Huskers, against a team they were favored to beat by two touchdowns, jumps up big like Minnesota did in the MicronPC.com Bowl only to go up in flames at the end.

It didn't quite work out like that, did it?

But you can be sure the Big Red got plenty of pub.

The Alamo Bowl was *the* game ESPN labeled as the one outside of the Orange Bowl not to miss. If you didn't follow that advice, don't look for it to end up as an ESPN Classic.

While pummeling the Big Ten Conference tri-champions, Nebraska proved it *can* put up a more dominating performance than the one it stuffed down Florida's throat five years ago in Tempe, Ariz.

No, the reward wasn't the same. An Alamo Bowl champions trophy doesn't shine like a Sears Cup. But you know what? A lot of Huskers had the same kind of gleam in their eyes coming out of the Alamodome locker room.

All the talk was about Northwestern being ready to pull yet another stunner to cap a season it began as everyone's favorite to finish last in the Big Ten.

Chicago Tribune columnist Skip Bayless predicted a Wildcat victory, going ridiculously so far to suggest the Huskers might be the most overrated No. 1 team ever.

I wonder how he feels right now?

Nebraska won 66-17. That's right — 66-17.

The Huskers rolled up a scoring explosion like no team in the history of bowl games has ever produced.

Ever!

Sure, Northwestern's defense showed its true colors. Everybody padded their statistics against the Wildcats.

But take nothing away from Nebraska's performance.

The Huskers trailed 10-7 with 14:16 left in the first half. One play later, Eric Crouch cut an option right to the inside and raced 50 yards to start a 31-point eruption.

All in the second quarter.

"Any time we sensed a little bit of a momentum change, they struck right back," Northwestern Coach Randy Walker said. "I think that's what great football teams do."

It's probably a stretch to place the 2000 Huskers in that cat-

egory. If Nebraska was a great team, it would've ended up in Miami instead of San Antonio.

The Huskers would have cut off Oklahoma's oxygen supply after racing to that 14-0 lead. They would have sent Kansas State quarterback Jonathan Beasley through the wringer instead of allowing him to complete a stirring comeback.

But you'd better believe that both the Sooners and Wildcats were content watching the Huskers perform their final act of the season from the safety of a hotel room . . . because Nebraska looked like the team everyone had projected when the season began.

I-back Dan Alexander, looking very much like the Pittsburgh Steelers' Jerome Bettis, bussed his way to a career-best 240 yards rushing on 20 carries. Well before halftime, he had already established the Alamo Bowl record.

Wingback Bobby Newcombe capped his career in style. The ballyhooed recruit, who became just another face in the crowd, caught an inside screen from Crouch and raced 58 yards to the end zone before the end of the first half. Later, he delivered a 69-yard touchdown toss to Matt Davison.

And rush end Kyle Vanden Bosch played as if a pro scout had told him his performance would determine where he goes in April's NFL draft. The Draddy Award winner as the top student-athlete in college football did some schooling in Northwestern's backfield, notching three tackles for losses, five quarterback hurries and one sack.

The Huskers played with so much spunk that you would've sworn somebody had them believing Solich's future was on the line.

I suppose, at Nebraska, every game's important. But let's not get carried away.

And let's not go so far as to place the Huskers in that team-to-beat category for next season. A lot of things can happen before August.

Tank-like center Dominic Raiola will be in another team's training camp, as he's declared himself eligible for the NFL. And how will Nebraska recover from the loss of its two best defensive players — Carlos Polk and Vanden Bosch? You know it had problems this year adapting to life without Mike and Ralph Brown.

But let's leave those concerns, and others surrounding this proud program that some would have had you believe was on the brink of a collapse, for later discussion.

On Saturday, in a building that has produced magical outcomes for Nebraska (remember those Big 12 championship blowouts?), the Huskers pulled off a non-BCS bowl trick.

They didn't become the victim of a monumental upset in order to make you notice them.

"I'll tell you what," said sixth-year man Jason Schwab. "Bar none, it's the funnest game I've ever played in."

How's that for perfect timing? ■



**Dan Alexander ran like Jerome Bettis of the Pittsburgh Steelers.**

**Curt McKeever** is a sportswriter, covering the University of Nebraska for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football he is the primary beat writer for the men's basketball and baseball teams.



# Looking Ahead: A Very Mature

***With Raiola's departure, Fonoti one of only 2 line starters returning***

**By Mike Babcock**

**T**oniu Fonoti was regularly reminded of his age last season. "We're going out to the bars, Toniu. You want to come along?" his teammates in the offensive line would say.

Before he could answer, they would add, "Oh, sorry, you can't come. You're only 17."

That was part of playing as a true freshman, a harmless form of hazing. "It was just for fun," said Fonoti, who turned 18 in late November.

Despite his age, however, "he is a very mature kid," Nebraska offensive line coach Milt Tenopir said. "He's still a boy at heart. But he knows how to take care of his business."

Fonoti took care of business as the Cornhuskers' starting left guard well enough to earn second-team all-conference recognition and shatter the school record for knockdown blocks.

He was credited with 155 "pancakes," and had double figures in all but one game.

In short, he's a 6-foot-4, 335-pound irresistible force.

"Of course, he's the strongest guy we've got one-on-one," said Tenopir. "He's just a naturally strong person. He's the strongest individual we've got (in the line) exploding people up."

Fonoti also will be one of only two starters returning in the offensive line now that center Dominic Raiola has indicated he will forgo his senior season and submit his name for the NFL draft.

Left tackle Dave Volk, a senior-to-be, is the other returning starter.

Raiola's unexpected departure adds to a rebuilding task of an offensive unit that will have starters returning at just two other positions, quarterback Eric Crouch and tight end Tracey Wistrom.

Even though tight end Aaron Golliday, split end Wilson Thomas and wingback John Gibson, who is petitioning the NCAA for a sixth season of eligibility, all started in double-wing alignments and versatile offensive lineman Jon Rutherford was regarded as a sixth interior starter before suffering an ACL injury against Kansas, Nebraska's offense will have a markedly different look in 2001.

Still, "I think it will be excellent," Bobby Newcombe said after the Alamo Bowl victory.

Newcombe, Matt Davison and reliable back-up Tom Beveridge must be replaced at wide receiver, for example. "We lose an awful lot of receivers," said Coach Frank Solich.

But Newcombe is optimistic. "I had a chance to work with some of the underclassman wide receivers and they are intent in their blocking," he



Scott Bruhn

said. "That's what you need at Nebraska, (to) be intense in your blocking and also be able to make plays in the passing game, be willing to sit back and let somebody else shine as well. We have a lot of unselfish guys at receiver coming back next year."

"I think they're going to be an excellent squad."

Despite the loss of I-backs Dan Alexander and Correll Buckhalter and fullback Willie Miller, the Cornhuskers should be solid at running back, according to Solich. "I think we'll have depth at, really, all three of those positions," he said, including the quarter-

## Returning Offensive Starters

Pos.	Player	Current Yr.	2000 starts
LT	Dave Volk	Jr.	11
LG	Toniu Fonoti	So.	11
TE	Tracey Wistrom	Jr.	9
	Aaron Golliday	So.	3
QB	Eric Crouch	Jr.	11



# e 18-Year-Old



As a first-year starter, sophomore guard Toniu Fonoti shattered Nebraska's single-season record for pancake blocks, with 155 in 11 games.

the year, he has really got a good grasp of our scheme right now," Tenopir said prior to the Alamo Bowl. "He's going to have a great career."

Fonoti downplays his success. "I think I've made a little improvement," he said. "I'm still working on my game and learning more as I go along, taking on a little more responsibility."

He still needs to improve in strength and quickness, "trying to get that first step, those first two steps, getting from point A to point B as quickly as I can," he said. "That's what I was trying to work for this year. I think I've gotten a little bit better. But I still need some more."

"I've still got more space to work with."

Tenopir agrees, but only because there's always room for improvement. "He'll continue to wear off a little of that excess," said Tenopir. "He's about a 330-pound player any way you look at it because he's such a big guy. But his quickness surprises you. He's quicker than you'd think he would be."

"He runs well. He's very good in the open field on stuff that he has to pull on."

Fonoti also has the necessary intensity, though he's not as emotional as the departing Raiola.

"That's the neat thing," Tenopir said. "He's been a kid that you didn't have to teach him intensity. He knew what it took to play at this level from the get-go. I think part of that is the fact that he worked with some good people right off the bat. He ran with the first unit his very first practice."

"He saw what level he had to crank it up. He's competitive. He likes to finish people off."

Fonoti is mature beyond his years. "He's got his head on his shoulders," Tenopir said, crediting Fonoti's family as well. "A lot of it is the way he's been brought up." ■

backs.

Crouch was the team's second-leading rusher this season, gaining 971 yards and scoring 20 touchdowns. The senior-to-be needs just 186 yards to move ahead of Tommie Frazier as the school career leader in total offense. He already holds the career-rushing record for quarterbacks.

Crouch will miss spring practice following surgery on his right shoulder.

As usual, however, the Cornhusker offense figures to be only as effective as the line, which loses guard Russ Hochstein and tackle Jason Schwab in

addition to Raiola.

At Nebraska's final teleconference in Lincoln before leaving for San Antonio to begin on-site preparations for the Alamo Bowl game, before deciding to move on, Raiola endorsed Fonoti as a candidate for the Outland Trophy and Lombardi Award — Raiola was a finalist for both in 2000.

"There are a lot of other players on our line that could make it next year, like Fonoti," he said.

Fonoti improved significantly in his second season. "Even though he needed a little help on the assignments and that type of thing early in



## Looking Ahead:

# Newfound Focus

### *Stella more comfortable after a year's experience as starting linebacker*

**N**o one was happier about Mark Vedral's return to the Nebraska football team than Randy Stella. "Actually, I couldn't wait until Mark came back," Stella said.

Vedral, who missed the first two games because of a suspension, plays the same position as Stella, weakside linebacker. And until he returned, Stella wasn't getting any breathers.

Not that Stella was complaining. A year ago, he jokingly told reporters that he would be willing to play running back on offense as well as play defense and on special teams.

But "that was last year," he said. "I've been in the game for a while. I've got a whole new outlook on everything. That's too much work. I'm already tired, man."

He laughed and added, "If I could (play offense, too), I'd do it."

As a first-year starter, however, defense required his full attention.

"I had to learn a new role," said Stella, who replaced Julius Jackson and Eric Johnson. "I had never been in that kind of place before. You kind of develop that sense of responsibility."

The responsibility to which he referred involved learning discipline and the techniques required at his position, instead of simply relying on instinct and athletic ability.

Stella has plenty of both. He is among the fastest linebackers in school history, having been timed at 4.65 seconds in the 40-yard dash. And his instinct for the game is such that he has returned kickoffs and could be an outstanding I-back, according to the Cornhusker coaches.

But occasionally in his haste to make a play, he has taken himself out of position. "I'm used to flying around, just going straight to the ball," he said. "That's the best way."

It's not the only way, however, a fact he has learned.

"I'm more comfortable, especially now that I know something, instead of being in there with a kind of clueless attitude sometimes," he said. "Now I can be focused and know what my assignments are."

Despite missing one game because of a suspension, Stella finished second on the team in tackles with 58, indisputable evidence of his newfound focus and understanding of assignments. He also was second on the team in tackles for loss, with 15, and shared the lead in quarterback sacks, with 5.5.

"I believe I made pretty good improvement from last year, having to come in and start," he said. "It was a big adjustment for me. I really have taken a stricter kind of mental attitude."

"I think I made pretty good steps for myself."

Initially, Stella might not have realized "how much he was going to have to work as far as preparation and being in the right place," said defensive coordinator and linebackers coach Craig Bohl.

"The speed of the game is so fast, if you're not in the right place, even though you're a good athlete, you're not going to make plays. I think he saw that earlier in the year. When you're going full-speed, you'd better be in the right position because other people have very good athletes, too."

Stella is among 11 players at eight defensive positions who have started at least once. That's reason for optimism in 2001. "Certainly to have more experience on the field is going to help," Bohl said. "There's nothing you can do to replicate game experience, even limited game experience."

Right rush end, middle linebacker and rover are the only positions at which starters don't return, with the most significant individual losses on defense being Kyle Vanden Bosch,





# s, Understanding



Returning Defensive Starters			
Pos.	Player	Current Yr.	2000 starts
LRE	Demoine Adams	So.	4
	Chris Kelsay	So.	7
NT	Jason Lohr	Jr.	11
DT	Jeremy Slechta	Jr.	4
SLB	Scott Shanle	So.	9
WLB	Randy Stella	Jr.	10
	Mark Vedral	Jr.	1
LCB	Keyuo Craver	Jr.	11
FS	Dion Booker	Jr.	7
RCB	Erwin Swiney	Jr.	10
	DeJuan Groce	So.	2

Carlos Polk, Loran Kaiser, Joe Walker, Clint Finley and Troy Watchorn, all of whom were starters.

Stella is among those who must fill the leadership void. And Bohl is confident that will occur.

"It's interesting the dynamics that begin to unfold as you go into bowl preparations," he said on the morning following the 66-17 Alamo Bowl game victory against Northwestern.

"The guys that are going to be seniors start to look around and say, 'You know what, next year we're going to be seniors.' They're still underclassmen and they're trying to feel their way.

"But you can see and kind of sense in the tempo of practice (that) they're starting to feel, 'OK, this next year we're going to be the guys that are leading this crew.'"

That's especially true of players who have worn Blackshirts.

"I saw it with Jason (Peter) and Grant (Wistrom) when they were younger," said Bohl. "They were kind of quiet, but their demeanor began to change. I think you see some players like Keyuo Craver, who's been a dominant player for us for a lot of years, step

into that mold."

Craver, a senior-to-be, is a two-year starter at cornerback.

The Cornhuskers ranked 26th nationally in total defense and scoring defense, allowing 321.8 yards and 19.4 points per game — the points were the highest allowed by Nebraska since 1958.

They ranked seventh nationally in pass efficiency defense. Opponents completed less than 50 percent of their passes, for only 10 touchdowns with 14 interceptions.

Nebraska held Northwestern's no-huddle, spread offense to nearly 100 yards under its season's average. And the Wildcats completed only 17-of-43 passes.

"I think we're on the right track," said Bohl.

"We're not where we want to be, though . . . to really win championships, you've got to be dominant on defense and be able to stem a tide of momentum at any time."

The defense has to become "an iron curtain," he said. "We're not there yet, but I do think we're making progress, specifically concerning spread offenses. I think we're doing some things that are on the cutting edge that we've just got to continue to look at and improve and refine."

Stella will contribute to that progress, rested or not. ■

**Weakside linebacker Randy Stella was Nebraska's second leading tackler with 58 stops, including 15 tackles for loss and 5.5 sacks.**



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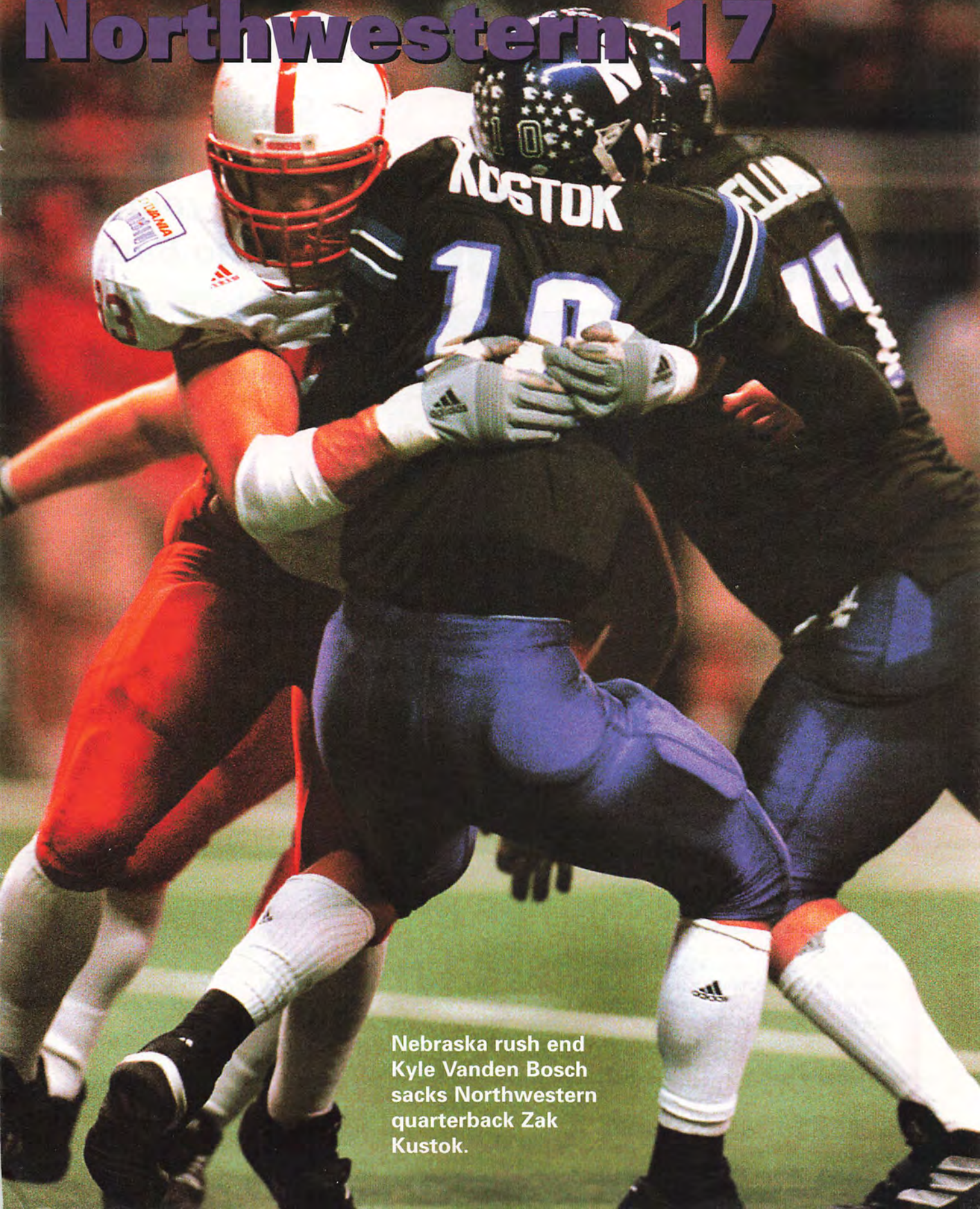
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**HANA  
TIME**



# Nebraska 66

# Northwestern 17



Nebraska rush end  
Kyle Vanden Bosch  
sacks Northwestern  
quarterback Zak  
Kustok.



## Husker Player of the Game

# Vanden Bosch Shares Credit

Kyle Vanden Bosch picked up his trophy as the most valuable defensive player and prepared to leave the interview area following the record-setting victory against Northwestern.

"Is it heavy?" cornerback DeJuan Groce asked, reaching to touch the trophy.

Vanden Bosch, a dedicated weight lifter, admitted that it was.

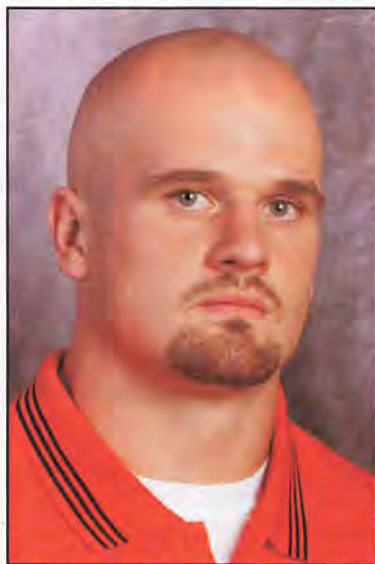
And in characteristic fashion, the Cornhuskers' senior rush end refused to take all of the credit for earning it, despite having been a thorn in Northwestern's side all evening.

"As far as myself, our game plan really opened it up for the rush end position," he said. "There were a lot of opportunities for me to make plays. We knew coming in that in order for our defense to play well today, the rush end position was going to have to make some big plays."

He definitely did. He was involved in five tackles, including three for losses totaling 10 yards and one sack. He also broke up a pass and was credited with five quarterback hurries.

"Kyle, I thought, had maybe as good a game as I've seen in a long time," said Nebraska Coach Frank Solich. "He disrupted their offense throughout most of the first half. It seemed like he played at a level that was just outstanding and had great energy throughout the course of the whole game."

"I think his quickness and strength caused a lot of problems



Kyle Vanden Bosch

for them."

Vanden Bosch nearly tackled the Wildcats' Damien Anderson for a safety early in the second quarter, pulling down the All-American running back for a 3-yard loss just inches from the goal line.

The Cornhuskers were leading 21-10 at the time.

"We had a great (defensive) game plan coming in," Vanden Bosch said. "A lot of credit goes to Coach (Craig) Bohl (defensive coordinator) and our defensive staff."

"The coaches put us in a position to make a lot of plays. Again, a lot of it was the schemes we were in, just giving me a chance to do what I do, be aggressive and make a lot of plays." ■

## Surprise play puts cap on 66-17 rout in Alamo Bowl

By Mike Babcock  
Photos by Scott Bruhn

**C**arlos Polk predicted the pass. Or, at least, DeJuan Groce claims he did.

Late in the third quarter of Nebraska's record-setting 66-17 victory against Big Ten tri-champion Northwestern in the Alamo Bowl game, Polk told Groce the trick play was coming.

"I was like, 'Right,'" said a disbelieving Groce, a sophomore cornerback.

But sure enough, on first-and-10 with the score 52-17, Eric Crouch lateraled the ball to Bobby Newcombe, who tossed it down the field to a wide-open Matt Davison.

The play went from quarterback to wingback to split end for 69 yards and six points.

"That play has been in there for I don't know how long," Groce said.

The Northwestern fans that remained in the north end zone seats at the Alamodome weren't amused by Cornhusker Coach Frank Solich's choice of plays given the score.

"He wanted to put the dagger in them, I guess," said Groce.

Newcombe's only pass of the season produced Davison's second touchdown of the game, and eliminated any possibility that Northwestern might mount a dramatic comeback.

Nebraska appeared to have control at halftime, leading 38-17.

But "it was never a game that, even though the score was mounting, I truly felt comfortable with



# Contest



Four Nebraska seniors enjoy the moment after the impressive victory. Carlos Polk (13) and Loran Kaiser (91) admire the Alamo Bowl trophy held by Jason Schwab (second from left) and Russ Hochstein.

until into the fourth quarter, when we really had the game pretty well in-hand," Solich said.

"Against a team like Northwestern that is so explosive offensively, you worry because they have shown the ability to come back against almost everybody they've played."

The Wildcats ranked third nationally in total offense and ninth in scoring, averaging 475.6 yards and 38.56 points per game. They "posed a big challenge," said Nebraska defensive coordinator Craig Bohl. "I thought during the course of the game you saw how explosive they could be."

The crowd of 60,028 saw only

glimpses of Northwestern's explosiveness because of an aggressive Cornhusker defense that "really rose to the occasion," Solich said.

The Blackshirts, led by senior rush end Kyle Vanden Bosch, contained running back Damien Anderson and relentlessly pressured quarterback Zak Kustok.



**Nebraska wingback Bobby Newcombe returns a punt 32 yards to the Northwestern 8 in the second quarter. Newcombe threw for a touchdown and caught a pass for a touchdown.**

Anderson, who rushed for 1,914 yards for the season, managed 149 on 18 carries. But 126 of the yards came on two carries, including 69 on a touchdown run late in the first half.

The Wildcats cut the deficit to 31-17 with that score. But 50 seconds later, on second-down-and-6, Crouch tossed a pass to Newcombe on a jail-break screen and the senior wingback took the ball 58 yards to score. "I really didn't think it was going to go too far," said Newcombe.

"They had clogged the middle pretty significantly and that's where the play was supposed to go. As soon as I caught it, I tried to do a little reverse action. Then I saw (split end) Wilson Thomas making a great block and it was pretty much all over from there."

That applied to the game as well as to the play. "It was real important psychologically for us to match their score, to keep our momentum in the game," Newcombe said.

Northwestern had the lead only once, 10-7 early in the second quarter. At that point, the Wildcats "started running their mouths," said Cornhusker Dominic Raiola. "We just blasted them, and they kept talking. Then they started with the cheap shots, no class at all.

"We kept our class. And we beat the heck out of them."

The manner in which the Wildcats conducted themselves was a significant issue among some vocal Nebraska players following the game. "They were playing dirty football," Polk said. "They were doing a lot of cheap maneuvers, taking out some frustration I guess, trying to cut you.

"They were throwing punches and grabbing our facemasks."

Even though Solich tried to downplay such claims, "I thought there was more activity unrelated to football than I had seen for a while," he said. "I think our players felt that way. Maybe their players felt that same way, too. It was a physical football game. I think both teams came in with the idea that they were going to be the most physical. When that happens, sometimes you get quite a bit of extra pushes and shoves. But I think Coach (Randy) Walker and his staff and team handled it well."



Nevertheless, "we did address it throughout the course of the game. We addressed it at halftime. We addressed it in the second half. And we addressed it after the game," he said.

Northwestern's defense tried unsuccessfully to address the running of I-back Dan Alexander, who carried 20 times for an Alamo Bowl-record 240 yards and two touchdowns.

The 240 rushing yards also were a Cornhusker bowl record, breaking the previous mark of 206 yards, set by Ahman Green in the 1998 Orange Bowl game against Tennessee.

Alexander broke the Alamo Bowl record — 113 yards by Iowa's Sedrick Shaw in 1996 — on his ninth carry, midway through the second quarter. "It wasn't so much me," he said. "I think any running back in the

nation could have run through the holes that our offensive line made.

"So I give a lot of credit to them, just making me look good."

Alexander, who was selected as the game's most valuable offensive player, was among several seniors who looked good in their final game at Nebraska.

"I'm really pleased with the seniors in general. I think you saw a group of seniors that made just one play after another," said Solich. "It's an outstanding group. They're going to be missed.

"It's great to be able to see the seniors go out in this manner."

Newcombe and Davison were among them, of course. And their touchdown pass was a subject of considerable discussion afterward. "Matt and I were kind of joking around on the sideline and I told him





# 4TH & 1NCHES

Notes And Quotes From The Alamo Bowl Game

## NOT THAT BAD

The 49-point margin of victory notwithstanding, Northwestern was a formidable opponent, according to Cornhusker Coach Frank Solich. "You can't say they're not a good football team. They're a very good football team," he said of the Big Ten tri-champions. "It's just that I think we were a much better football team in this game. We had a lot of things that went well, and we got rolling pretty good."

"And once we got rolling, it got a little bit out of hand."

Nebraska middle linebacker Carlos Polk, who is from Rockford, Ill., was less generous in assessing the Wildcats. "That shows you what the Big Ten is," he said. "I don't think they had any room being on the same field with us. We played a decent program; I wouldn't say good."

Northwestern shared the Big Ten title with Purdue and Michigan. The Boilermakers lost to Washington in the Rose Bowl, while Michigan defeated Auburn in the Citrus Bowl.

Solich declined to draw conclusions about the relative strengths of the Big Ten and Big 12.

"I don't think you take one or two ball games as an indicator and say that we're so much better than the other conference or what have you," said Solich. "But I think on this day, our team was certainly playing good football . . . it was pretty dominating."

"There are other games that will determine where the conference is, but I think most people feel that the Big 12 was as strong a conference as there was in the country this year."

"I think the Big 12 coaches would tell you that."

Such an assessment was supported by Oklahoma's winning the national title with a 13-2 Orange Bowl game victory against Florida State. Big 12 teams won four of seven bowl games.

The four victories were by former Big Eight schools. The three losses were by former Southwest Conference schools. By comparison, the Big Ten lost four of six bowl games.

## MOTIVATION

Solich seemed to grow weary of questions regarding the Cornhuskers' motivation for playing in a non-BCS bowl game. "I don't know that it bothered me as much as that kind of question is probably a little bit hard for me to understand," he said the morning after the Alamo Bowl game.

"Every game is so important. The preparation for every game is there by the staff and you generally see it in the players. If there's any validity to what you tell them and how you go about things, it wouldn't make a difference who we were playing or what bowl game we were in."

"This was another chance to play football. There were some things that were motivational. We're after as high a ranking as we can get in the final polls, and I think this team feels that it is a very good football team and should be ranked with the best teams. Certainly that is a lot to play for."

Nebraska went into the Alamo Bowl game ranked No. 9 in the Associated Press poll and No. 8 in the USA Today/ESPN coaches poll. Despite their impressive victory, they moved up only one place in each poll. Their final AP ranking was No. 8. Their final coaches poll ranking was No. 7.

The Cornhuskers were one place ahead of Kansas State in both final polls.

Texas finished No. 12 in both polls, following a loss against Oregon in the Holiday Bowl. Iowa State was the only other Big 12 team in the final rankings, finishing No. 25 and No. 23.

## MOTIVATION, TOO

Former Cornhusker All-American Mike Brown spoke in the defensive meeting prior to the game. "It was more of a motivational thing," said sophomore cornerback DeJuan Groce.

Brown, who led the NFL's Chicago Bears in tackles as a rookie, told the Blackshirts "everybody needed to play with their hearts and nothing could stop us," Groce said.

## FOR THE RECORD

Nebraska broke 12 Alamo Bowl game offensive records, among them points (66), total offense yards (636), rushing yards (467), first downs (28) and average yards per play (7.7).

The 66 points also were an NCAA Division I-A bowl game record.

Senior I-back Dan Alexander broke the Alamo Bowl individual rushing record on his ninth carry midway through the second quarter and finished with the most rushing yards in the bowl game by a Cornhusker. He turned in the 30th 200-yard rushing performance (all games) in school history. ■

I wasn't going to under-throw him," Newcombe said. "He just told me that we've been practicing that play for four years and it was about time we actually got a touchdown on it."

Though bowl game statistics don't count in official career totals, Newcombe, a former quarterback, finished with the highest pass completion percentage in school history, 62.6.

"That was nice," said Davison. "Bobby and I, we came in together, and we've been through a lot. We've always talked about how we practice that play all the time and the coaches never call it. So it was kind of nice to get that one run this game and get some good out of it."

The Wildcats weren't the only ones taken by surprise.

But "I wasn't surprised," Groce said. "Carlos called it." ■



# BY THE NUMBERS

## Alamo Bowl: Northwestern vs. Nebraska Dec. 30, 2000 • Alamodome • San Antonio, Texas

### Score By Quarters

<b>Northwestern</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>—</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Nebraska</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>—</b>	<b>66</b>

### Team Stats

	NW	NU
First Downs	14	28
Rushing	6	24
Passing	6	3
Penalty	2	1
Rushing Attempts	38	69
Yards Gained Rushing	269	519
Yards Lost Rushing	37	43
Net Yards Rushing	232	476
Net Yards Passing	151	160
Passes Attempted	43	14
Passes Completed	17	6
Had Intercepted	1	1
Total Plays	81	83
Total Net Yards	383	636
Avg. Gain Per Play	4.7	7.7
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	2-1
Penalties-Yards	7-46	4-67
Punts-Yards	10-357	3-133
Avg. Per Punt	35.7	44.3
Punt Returns-Yards	2-6	9-81
Interceptions-Yards	1-0	1-6
Fumble Returns-Yards	0-0	0-0
Kickoff Returns-Yards	6-112	4-102
Possession Time	26:23	33:37

### Scoring

**NU** — Dan Alexander 15-yard run (Josh Brown kick)  
**NW** — Tim Long 44-yard field goal  
**NW** — Teddy Johnson 10-yard pass from Zak Kustok (Long kick)  
**NU** — Eric Crouch 50-yard run (Brown kick)  
**NU** — Alexander 2-yard run (Brown kick)  
**NU** — Crouch 2-yard run (Brown kick)  
**NU** — Brown 52-yard field goal  
**NW** — Damien Anderson 59-yard run (Long kick)  
**NU** — Bobby Newcombe 58-yard pass from Eric Crouch (Brown kick)  
**NU** — Matt Davison 11-yard pass from Crouch (Brown kick)  
**NU** — Crouch 2-yard run (Brown kick)  
**NU** — Davison 69-yard pass from Newcombe (Brown kick)  
**NU** — Dahrran Diedrick 9-yard run (Brown kick)  
**Att.** — 60,028

### Individual Leaders

#### NORTHWESTERN

##### RUSHING

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Anderson, D.	18	149	8.3	69	1
Kustok, Z.	14	55	3.9	30	0
Simmons, S.	2	14	7.0	13	0
Lawrence, K.	3	13	4.3	6	0
Danielson, M.	1	1	1.0	1	0

##### PASSING

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Kustok, Z.	15-35-0	.429	138	1
Danielson, M.	2-8-1	.250	13	0

##### RECEIVING

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Johnson, T.	4	53	13.3	34	1
Anderson, D.	4	12	3.0	7	0
Simmons, S.	3	24	8.0	13	0
Foster, R.	2	41	20.5	34	0
Patrick, K.	2	6	3.0	8	0
Schweighardt, J.	1	9	9.0	9	0
Wright, J.	1	6	6.0	6	0

##### PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Standring, J.	10	357	35.7	44

##### PUNT RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Simmons, S.	1	0	0.0	0	0
Thompson, D.	1	6	6.0	6	0

##### KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Johnson, T.	2	40	20.0	31	0
Wright, J.	1	19	19.0	19	0
Stuckey, T.	1	14	14.0	14	0
Ayeni, L.	2	39	19.5	25	0

##### DEFENSIVE LEADERS

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Harris, N.	8	6	14	0	0	0
Morton, R.	7	4	11	0	0	0
Silva, B.	6	2	8	0	0	0
Bentley, K.	5	3	8	0	0	0
Covington, R.	5	1	6	0	0	0
Wheeler, R.	2	3	5	0	0	0
Foster, R.	3	1	4	0	0	0
Brown, M.	2	2	4	0	0	0
Wieber, S.	2	2	4	0	0	0
Blackmon, H.	3	0	3	0	0	0
Champman, P.	3	0	3	2-6	0	0
Durr, P.	3	0	3	0	0	0
Missouri, D.	2	1	3	2-9	0	0

#### NEBRASKA

##### RUSHING

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Alexander, D.	20	240	12.0	37	2
Crouch, E.	15	90	6.0	50	1
Buckhalter, C.	12	55	4.6	21	1
Diedrick, D.	4	28	7.0	17	1
Davies, J.	3	17	5.7	13	0
Lord, J.	4	16	4.0	7	0
Miller, W.	3	10	3.3	8	0
Collins, T.	3	9	3.0	10	0
Newcombe, B.	1	5	5.0	5	0
Grixby, D.	2	3	1.5	4	0
Chrisman, J.	1	0	0.0	0	0

##### PASSING

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	5-13-1	.385	91	2
Newcombe, B.	1-1-0	1.000	69	1

##### RECEIVING

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Davison, M.	3	85	28.3	69	2
Newcombe, B.	1	58	58.0	58	1
Bowling, J.	1	9	9.0	9	0
Hassebroek, T.	1	8	8.0	8	0

##### PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Hadenfeldt, D.	3	133	44.3	53

##### PUNT RETURNS

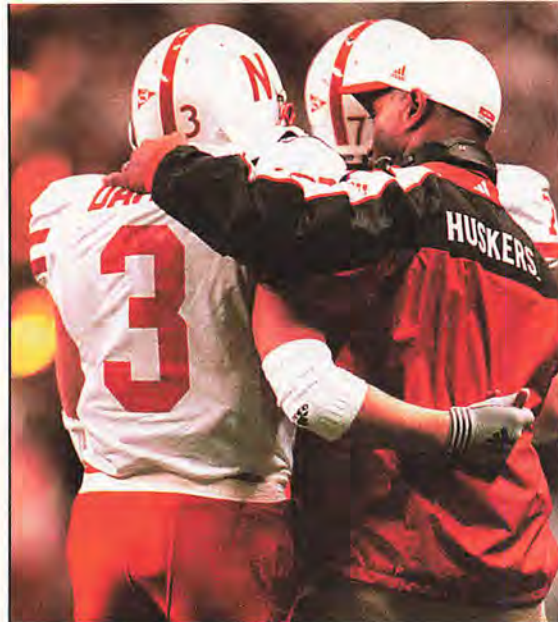
Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Newcombe, B.	3	43	14.3	33	0
Davies, J.	1	17	17.0	17	0
Butler	1	6	6.0	6	0
Walker	4	15	3.8	14	0

##### KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Walker, J.	1	33	33.0	33	0
Stella, R.	2	52	26.0	31	0
Hollowell, T.	1	17	17.0	17	0

##### DEFENSIVE LEADERS

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Booker, D.	5	2	7	0	0	0
Groce, D.	5	0	5	0	0	0
Vanden Bosch, K.	5	0	5	3-10	0	1-5
Craver, K.	4	1	5	2-2	0	0
Burrow, J.	3	2	5	1-2	0	0
Kaiser, L.	1	3	4	1-2	0	0
Pippens, J.	3	0	3	0	0	0
Lohr, J.	2	1	3	1-9	0	1-9
Stella, R.	2	1	3	0	0	0
Watchorn, T.	2	1	3	0	0	0



Receivers coach Ron Brown congratulates Matt Davison. The senior split end had 3 catches for 85 yards and 2 touchdowns.

### 10 SEASON STATS

(NOTE: BOWL GAME STATISTICS DO NOT COUNT ON OFFICIAL 2000 STATISTICS)

#### RUSHING LEADERS

Name	G	Att.	Yds.	YPG	TD
Alexander, D.	11	182	1,154	104.9	8
Crouch, E.	11	169	971	88.3	20
Buckhalter, C.	11	106	750	68.2	7
Miller, W.	11	45	225	20.5	2
Diedrick, D.	11	33	212	19.3	3
Davies, J.	11	18	183	16.6	1
Lord, J.	6	28	130	21.7	4
Collins, T.	4	13	77	19.3	0
Grixby, D.	11	10	61	5.5	0
Kastl, P.	6	6	25	4.3	0
Miller, R.	4	5	23	5.8	0
Newcombe, B.	11	9	18	1.6	0

#### PASSING

Name	G	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	11	75-156-7	48.1	1,101	11
Lord, J.	6	9-16-1	56.2	116	0

#### RECEIVING LEADERS

Name	G	No.	Yds.	YPC	YPG	TD
Davison, M.	11	21	389	18.5	35.4	3
Wistrom, T.	11	19	314	16.5	28.5	5
Newcombe, B.	11	19	249	13.1	22.6	0
Gibson, J.	11	8	41	5.1	3.7	1
Buckhalter, C.	11	5	85	17.0	7.7	1
Bowling, J.	11	4	46	11.5	4.2	1
Davies, J.	11	3	49	16.3	4.5	0
Alexander, D.	11	2	17	8.5	1.5	0

#### FIELD GOALS

Name	G	Att.	Good	Long
Brown, J.	11	10	5	40

#### PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Hadenfeldt, D.	39	1,708	43.8	62
Brown, J.	1	28	28.0	28

#### DEFENSIVE LEADERS

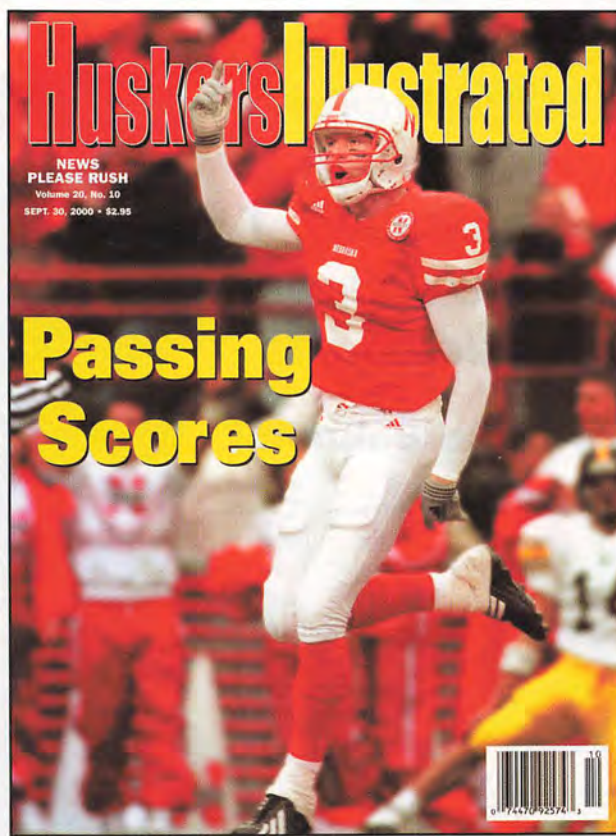
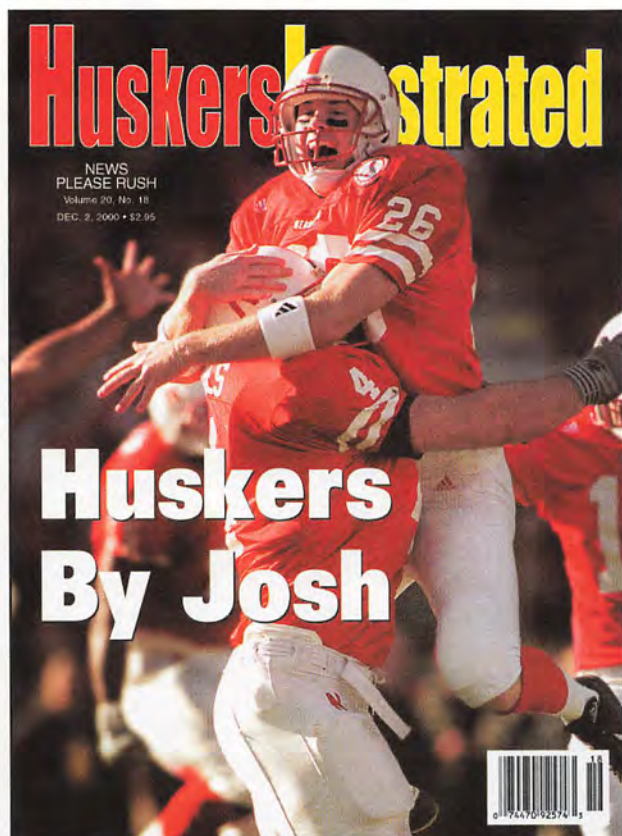
Name	G	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	S/Yds.
Polk, C.	11	40	50	90	9-30	1-39	1.5-13
Stella, R.	10	34	24	58	15-40	0	5.5-29
Vanden Bosch, K.	11	30	26	56	17-66	0	5.5-37
Craver, K.	11	33	23	56	6-20	0	2.5-16
Shanley, S.	11	30	25	55	4-7	1-18	1-4
Lohr, J.	11	19	27	46	6-16	0	2-10
Walker, J.	11	24	20	44	2-2	2-24	0
Booker, D.	11	18	16	34	2-10	0	0
Kelsay, C.	11	9	20	29	2-5	0	0.5-4
Watchorn, T.	11	10	17	27	2-3	5-64	0
Groce, D.	11	20	6	26	1-6	1-0	0

#### TEAM STATISTICS

Total Offensive Yards	5,059	3,540				
Plays	808	738				
Average Per Play	6.3	4.8				
Average Per Game	459.9	322.0				
Net Rushing Yards	3,842	1,249				
Attempts	636	345				
TDs Rushing	45	12				
Net Passing Yards	1,217	2,291				
Completions	84	179				
Average Per Pass	7.1	5.8				
Average Per Catch	14.5	17.8				
Average Per Game	110.6	208.3				
TDs Passing	11	10				
Sacks By-Yards	25-145	10-75				
Fumbles-Lost	26-9	14-5				
Penalties-Yards	71-622	83-654				
<b>Scoring</b>	<b>1st</b>	<b>2nd</b>	<b>3rd</b>	<b>4th</b>	<b>OT</b>	<b>TOT</b>
NU	150	111	78	111	6	456
Opponents	34	74	53	49	3	213



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# . . . All The Time



# He Was Tough

## **Linebacker Murtaugh remains No. 1 on NU's career tackle charts**

**By Mike Babcock**

**J**erry Murtaugh's estimate of the number of stadium steps he ran for disciplinary reasons during his career at Nebraska is exaggerated, though probably not all that much.

"I must have run 100,000 steps," he said recently.

"I was always in trouble for the stupid things I did."

Coach Bob Devaney rarely talked to Murtaugh, except in such situations, to dispense discipline and send him chugging up and down the steps following — or during — practice.

In his four years as a Cornhusker linebacker, "Coach Devaney might have said 'hi' to me twice," said Murtaugh. "We never talked. I didn't know the man."

That changed many years later. Murtaugh got to know the Hall of Fame coach before he died. But while Murtaugh was playing, communication between the two was unspoken, if at all.

Occasionally during practice, Devaney would "come by and just shake his head at me," Murtaugh said. "He'd pat other guys on the back to pump them up. But not me."

Murtaugh didn't resent Devaney's lack of personal attention, however. Quite the contrary.

"I knew what I had to do," he said. And Devaney knew that he knew.

In fact, even though the two never exchanged pleasantries, "I think we understood each other," said Murtaugh, the leader of the defense on Devaney's 1970 national champi-



**Co-captains Dan Schneiss (left) and Jerry Murtaugh hold the Orange Bowl trophy after the Huskers' 17-12 victory over LSU Jan 1, 1971.**

onship team.

In many ways, Murtaugh was the definitive Devaney player. He was tough, among the toughest and meanest ever to play at Nebraska, according to those with whom he played.

His teammates called him "Rat,"

and his reputation for nastiness has survived for 30 years, reinforced by his name's remaining atop the Cornhuskers' career-tackles list.

Murtaugh was involved in 342 tackles during his career, 55 more than Mike Brown, who is second on the all-



time list. And Murtaugh amassed his total in just three seasons.

The NCAA didn't reinstate freshman eligibility until the early 1970s.

Murtaugh is quick to credit teammates for the record. Middle guard Ed Periard and defensive tackle Dave Walline were among those who kept blockers busy so he could make the tackles.

But Murtaugh's instinct for the ball and his determination to get to those who carried it also were significant factors. He wasn't exceptionally fast, and at 6-foot-3 and 212 pounds, he wasn't overly large for a linebacker, even 30 years ago. But he was quick to the ball, and relentless.

And he had a burning desire to be the best. His singular goal when he came to Nebraska from Omaha North High School — turning down Oklahoma in the process — was to play in the NFL.

In retrospect, that focus on the NFL probably didn't allow him to enjoy his experiences at Nebraska as much as he should have. "At the time, I didn't understand," he said.

"All I wanted to do was play pro football."

He had the temperament but not the size or speed for which NFL scouts were looking, so he wasn't drafted. But he signed as a free agent with the New England Patriots. But a knee injury ended his first pro season before it began, and a year later, another knee injury ended his pro career.

"That was it," he said. "I thought my life was over. Pro football is all I ever wanted to do, all my life. And when your dream is totally over, it's a tough transition for young people."

He returned to Nebraska to finish his degree, and after teaching physical education at the elementary school level for a year in the Omaha area, he went to work for the Union Pacific Railroad.

He still works for the railroad, in addition to coaching football at Omaha Creighton Prep as well as serving as an assistant with the Omaha Beef, an indoor football team. He also is involved in raising money to place full-time strength and conditioning coaches in Nebraska high schools.

Murtaugh was among the first Cornhuskers to lift weights under the direction of Boyd Epley, Nebraska's director of athletic performance.



Thirty years have passed since Nebraska won its first official national title. And during those 30 years, Nebraska has finished atop the national rankings four more times, including three from 1994 to 1997. As the 1970 season illustrates, championships can depend on luck as well as on preparation and design.

"Boyd, he was so far advanced," said Murtaugh. "He told me once, 'Murt, I've got a plan. Ten, 15 years from now, you'll know exactly what I mean.'"

That plan is embodied in the Cornhuskers' cutting-edge strength and conditioning complex.

Murtaugh and fullback Dan Schneiss were co-captains on Nebraska's first national championship team. And they characterized that team, according to Murtaugh. The 1970 Cornhuskers were no-nonsense and "meaner than hell," he said. "We didn't have any superstars. We just got it done."

Murtaugh predicted that Nebraska would get it done in 1970. And he didn't keep his opinion to himself, sharing it with the Big Eight Skywriters in early September.

Based on the 1969 season, when the Cornhuskers won their final seven games — including a 45-6 pounding of Georgia in the Sun Bowl game — to finish with a 9-2 record and ranked 11th and 12th nationally in the two major polls, "I thought, 'We've got quite a chance at it,'" he said.

Devaney didn't mind Murtaugh's confidence. He just didn't want it made public.

So no sooner were the words

"national championship" out of his mouth than teammate Jeff Kinney "grabbed me," said Murtaugh. "Coach Devaney told him to tell me to shut up."

"That's one time Bob talked to me. Fortunately, I was right."

By season's end, none of the Cornhuskers hid their confidence. Murtaugh was among several who openly predicted a victory against Louisiana State in the Orange Bowl game.

Murtaugh also was outspoken in the locker room following Nebraska's 17-12 victory against the Tigers. The two teams ranked ahead of the Cornhuskers when New Year's Day began, Texas and Ohio State, had both been upset, allowing Nebraska to claim the national title.

President Richard Nixon had called to congratulate Texas on winning a national championship, so Murtaugh was adamant that the Cornhuskers deserved such a congratulatory call. "I said, 'There's a phone down here. It's our turn,'" Murtaugh said. "He should have called us."

Nixon didn't call the Nebraska locker room at the Orange Bowl stadium. But he did stop in Lincoln on his way from California back to Washington, D.C., two weeks later. His appearance to proclaim the Cornhuskers national champions drew 8,000 to the NU Coliseum, amid tight security.

As captains, Murtaugh and Schneiss joined Devaney and Nixon at the podium.

Prior to the ceremony, Murtaugh and Schneiss were briefed by Secret Service agents on how they were to conduct themselves when Nixon arrived. "They said to do nothing but stand there, and unless he wants to shake your hand, don't touch him," Murtaugh said of the instructions.

"He didn't even shake my hand, and I thought, 'Geez, he's rude.'"

Nixon did, however, push him in the chest to get him to step aside.

"Was that a handshake? Okie dokie," said Murtaugh.

The president of the United States was probably one of the few people who could have pushed the Cornhuskers' All-American linebacker without causing an incident. "I would have said something," Murtaugh said with a laugh. "But Devaney would have been unhappy." ■



# His First Love

**6-5 split end Thomas joins basketball team after bowl game**

**W**ilson Thomas is in line to succeed Matt Davison as the Nebraska football team's starting split end next season. But the Omaha sophomore's first love is basketball.

"Basketball has always been my love," Thomas said recently.

That's why the 6-foot-5, 205-pound Thomas joined Coach Barry Collier's basketball team after returning to Lincoln from San Antonio, Texas, and the Alamo Bowl game.

And just one week to the day after the bowl game, Thomas saw his first action, playing 15 minutes in the Cornhuskers' near-upset of Missouri at Columbia — they lost 68-66.

Thomas hit 1-of-3 shots from the field, grabbed two rebounds and defended the Tigers' talented Kareem Rush. The transition to the basketball court was surprisingly smooth.



Wilson Thomas

"I just felt, 'I'm going to get out there and play,'" said Thomas.

"I'm not going to hold myself back. I never wanted to be a player to play scared. As long as I'm out there, I'm going to play as hard as I can, and (to) the best of my ability."

That ability is considerable. Thomas earned all-state honors in basketball as a senior at North High School, averaging

16 points and nine rebounds per game for a 15-5 team.

His basketball skills were such that numerous major college programs, among them Davidson, Ohio State, Kansas, Colorado, Missouri, TCU and SMU, contacted him.

"They were all very interested," Thomas said.

And so was he. "When I came out of high school, I was looking to go to a school that would allow me to play both (basketball and football)," he said. Nebraska told him that he could.

He didn't play after redshirting as a true freshman, however, because "I was really focused on getting ready for football, and I had a little bit of an injury that was nagging me," said Thomas.

And a year ago, "things just didn't work out, the timing and stuff like that."

But he talked to Coach Frank Solich last spring to make sure he could join the basketball team after the football season ended. Solich and receivers coach Ron Brown "thought if I came out and I was going to help the team, they would be all for it, supporting me 100 percent," Thomas said.

If he weren't going to help the team, he wouldn't have played basketball.

"For me to come out and sit the bench, it's drawing away from what

## Cepero Brings Big-Game Experience to Basketball Team

Three days after leading the Nebraska volleyball team to the NCAA championship in Richmond, Va., Greichaly Cepero was playing for the Husker basketball team in her native Puerto Rico.

Cepero, the American Volleyball Coaches Association national player of the year, saw her first action for Coach Paul Sanderford's Husker basketball team in a victory against overmatched Puerto Rico-Mayaguez in the second game of the San Juan Shootout.

The 6-foot-2 Cepero, a freshman in basketball eligibility, has "the athleticism to be a WNBA player," according to Sanderford, who is quoted in the Husker media guide.

Although he wasn't expecting too much too soon from her, Sanderford said she would provide the Huskers with "stability and leadership. Even though she's a sophomore (in volleyball eligibility), she's such a presence on the floor. She just seems to never get flustered.

"The tougher the situation, the more calm she becomes. She's had to make big decisions already in her career.

She's had to get teams to rally around her, and players rally around her.

"She brings pretty good ball-handling skills, excellent jumping and rebounding skills."

Cepero is a "prototypical guard" in Nebraska's system, according to Sanderford.

Even though this is her first season on the basketball team, "that big-game experience, it doesn't matter if it's in water polo; it's big-game experience that pays off," Sanderford said. "She's got that aura, that presence. She'll make me a better coach before the year's over."

Cepero wasted little time in making Sanderford a better coach. She hit the winning shot with 35 seconds remaining in the Huskers' 56-53 victory at Brigham Young, in their final non-conference game. Cepero also hit two free throws to tie the game at 53 with 59 seconds remaining.

Nebraska had trailed by 15 points, 53-38, with 6:46 remaining in their first true road victory. ■



I'm here to do," he said. "So if I wasn't going to come in and be a big part of the team or help the team enough, then I would have probably had to step back because I'm sitting here away from the sport that's paying my schooling."

When he was younger, Thomas imagined that basketball rather than football would be paying for his college education. "The reason I played football in high school was to get me ready for basketball, make me a more physical player, get me used to banging on the blocks," he said.

Football will help to make him a better basketball player, and vice versa.

He will benefit from basketball "with my quickness," he said.

And "it will help me with a lot of different attributes that go along with playing receiver, as far as jump balls, my being a tall receiver, my timing, all of that. I feel it will help me."

Although he'll miss the football team's winter conditioning program, Thomas will be finished with basketball in time for spring practice, which is scheduled to begin on March 19.

A post-season basketball tournament appearance could delay him, but only slightly.

Thomas doesn't take missing winter conditioning lightly. But "I felt this was an opportunity to chase something I love," he said. "For football, I know I'm going to have to suck it up and this is going to make me have to work harder . . . (but) when you find something you love, you have to work hard to get it."

"I know the sacrifices. There are places I'm going to have to step up to."

Thomas is following Davison not only on the football field but also on the basketball court. Davison joined the basketball team last season, after the Fiesta Bowl game.

He started two games and averaged 2.4 points in 12.7 minutes of action.

Thomas, like Davison, brings the winning attitude of Cornhusker football to Collier's fledgling program. However, "I feel it would be wrong for me to come in and try to lead a team that has already established (its) leaders," said Thomas.

"But there are going to be things in practice that if I feel, you know, I need to speak my mind on certain things, I will . . . because I'm out there working just as hard as they are. So I'm going to speak my mind as a player next to them, going through the same struggles."

"I'm not going to speak down (to teammates) because I play football and we're more successful or whatever. I'm going to talk to them as a teammate, one-on-one." ■

# AIM SHOTS

*Notes And Quotes From The Basketball World*

## NO OMAHA?

Prior to the Cornhuskers' 62-51 loss against intrastate rival Creighton at the Devaney Sports Center, Nebraska Coach Barry Collier told the Omaha World-Herald that he would like to discontinue playing the Bluejays in Omaha when the current contract (which has three years remaining) expires.

The teams have played each other annually, alternating between Lincoln and Omaha, every season since 1977-78. They played twice in 1983-84, meeting in the NIT at Omaha.

Collier said he would consider playing Creighton on an annual basis, but only in Lincoln. Creighton Coach Dana Altman was passionate about continuing to alternate sites and even suggested playing twice each season, once in Lincoln and once in Omaha. "We ought to be playing," he said.

"My first year (at Creighton), when we were 7-9, I said, 'We'll go right now. You know how bad we are. As long as we sign a long-term deal, we'll go two right now.'"

"That's how strongly I felt about the game then. I still feel strongly."

This year's game drew 11,240 to the Devaney Sports Center. However, attendance for the game in Lincoln has declined over the last 10 years, according to Collier, and "that's a concern to me," he said. "The crowd we had against Murray State was very good, and a similar type crowd."

"But this one was better, so I'm encouraged by the interest in the game."

A crowd of 7,432 watched Nebraska lose to Murray State 79-71 at the Sports Center on the afternoon of the Alamo Bowl game. Average attendance for the Cornhuskers' five non-conference home games prior to Creighton's visit was 6,861. By comparison, the best attendance for a non-conference home game last season was 7,894 — for a double-overtime victory against Eastern Illinois.

Last season's high attendance for a Big 12 game was 10,969 for Kansas.

"The atmosphere tonight was outstanding," said Creighton's Altman. "For non-conference, I think it's a great game. I hope we can continue to play at least once a year, and maybe if everybody talks about it a little bit, we can play it twice a year because obviously the interest is here."

"I really believe it's good for the state of Nebraska's basketball."

Collier apparently isn't so sure. "Our contract with Creighton runs out in 2005, so I'll wait 'til then to comment on it again," he said. "Four years from now we'll talk about this again."

Creighton's victory this year was its first-ever at the Sports Center, and its first in Lincoln since Feb. 15, 1926. The teams did not play each other from 1932 to 1977.

Nebraska leads the series 21-12, but has lost the last two games in Omaha.

## PUERTO RICAN PRIZE

After losing to Missouri-Kansas City in the first game of the Husker Team Classic, the Cornhuskers rebounded to win the San Juan Shootout in late December.

Nebraska last won an eight-team in-season tournament at Hilo, Hawaii, in 1995-96.

The Cornhuskers opened the San Juan Shootout by defeating Iona 81-80, followed with a 69-68 victory against Kent State and wrapped up the title winning against SMU 72-70.

Center Kimani Ffriend was chosen tournament MVP after scoring 44 points and pulling down 22 rebounds. Cookie Belcher and Steffon Bradford joined him on the all-tournament team.

John Robinson II, a transfer point guard from New Mexico, saw his first action at Nebraska in the SMU game, scoring three points in 19 minutes of action.

Robinson became eligible after first semester but was suspended by Collier for three games.

"A few weeks ago, it would've been doubtful whether we could put together a couple of back-to-back close wins," Collier told the Lincoln Journal Star following the championship game.

The tournament's three victories gave Nebraska a five-game winning streak, which was snapped by a 74-70 overtime loss at Minnesota. The Cornhuskers finished non-conference play 7-6.

## SOUR GRAPES?

Former Cornhusker men's basketball coach Danny Nee filed a defamation of character lawsuit against Athletic Director Bill Byrne in late December, seeking damages of more than \$75,000.

Byrne's attorney, Fred Kauffman of Lincoln, told the Lincoln Journal Star that "from the university's point of view, the contractual obligations to Coach Nee were honored completely." ■





Above, Angie Oxley (2), Jenny Kropp (17) and Greichaly Cepero play defense in the championship match against Wisconsin. The Huskers defeated the Badgers 15-9, 9-15, 7-15, 15-2, 15-9 on Dec. 16 in Richmond, Va., to win the school's second national championship. At right, the Huskers display the spoils of victory.

**SIDEOUT**

**By Todd Henrichs**  
**Photos by Scott Bruhn**

# What's Next for Champs?

***Cook doesn't expect to see complacency  
when Huskers begin title defense***

**C**hampionship point was barely on the scoreboard before the questions were being asked.

Was this Nebraska volleyball

team the best ever to play at the collegiate level? Or looking ahead, what could the Huskers do for an encore?

Tough questions, indeed, for a team that came up with all the right answers in a storybook season

capped by the school's second national championship. Nebraska became just the second team in 20 years of NCAA volleyball to finish a championship season undefeated.

Coach John Cook can go at least another six months knowing he hasn't lost a match at Nebraska. It's just enough time to celebrate the significance of the past season so many of





the Huskers insisted passed right before their eyes.

The championship, they said, was almost anticlimactic after the six-month pursuit that began with the team's trip to China.

Even Cook understands that some rest and relaxation might be the best off-season strategy. Spring drills have been pushed back several weeks, as was winter conditioning, what Cook terms "boot camp."

Still, Cook doesn't expect to see any complacency among the Huskers when it comes time to defending the national championship.

"I'm pretty confident about that," Cook said. "Nancy Meendering is going to take this team and start running with it. She has a lot of motivation right now."

A two-time All-American, Meendering sat out the championship season as a redshirt. She'll

return in 2001 for her senior year alongside All-Americans Greichaly Cepero, Amber Holmquist and Laura Pilakowski and all-conference pick Jenny Kropp.

The Huskers lose seniors Angie Oxley, Kim Behrends and Jill McWilliams.

Anna Schrad is expected to fill a vacated starting spot, after playing a key role for Nebraska in her freshman season. Schrad started in Nebraska's five-game wins against Kansas State and South Carolina and came off the bench with key performances against Colorado State, Texas Tech and Hawaii, among others.

Cook expects Schrad to make tremendous gains in the strength program this off-season. By practicing with the team all year, Meendering is an improved passer now, set to take over from Oxley.

Cepero, too, can improve, Cook

said, even after a season that saw the sophomore setter win national player-of-the-year honors.

"This year was just about putting up hittable balls," Cook said. "We've got to spend more time with her refining things."

Cepero, however, is about the only Husker without time on her hands.

While some Husker fans were undoubtedly still celebrating the national championship, Cepero was in the hallway of the team's Richmond, Va., hotel awaiting a ride to the airport.

She joined the Nebraska basketball team the next day and played in her first game later that week.

Cook said he will go to watch Cepero play instead of fretting over how one of his best players could be injured playing another sport.

Time is also set aside for seeing movies and spending time with his





Above, Nebraska's three seniors, Angie Oxley (left), Kim Behrends and Jill McWilliams, proudly hoist the championship trophy. Below, John Cook was honored as national coach of the year, and Greichaly Cepero won the player of the year award.



family, luxuries that weren't available to the coach a year ago after taking over for Terry Pettit.

Instead of an 18-day tour of China, Cook and his team are looking forward to a possible spring trip to the White House and a chance to meet the president.

"This will be a much quieter winter," Cook said. "I don't have to hire a staff. In recruiting, we're way ahead of where we were last year."

Cook expects the championship will open additional recruiting opportunities for NU. He said he should now be able to talk with any player targeted by his staff across the country.

Pettit commanded such respect, but it wasn't so easy for Cook to get some of the nation's best high school standouts — many from warm-weather states — to think about Nebraska.

Still, the Huskers by all accounts signed a nationally competitive recruiting class in November and almost surely will be the No. 1-ranked team entering next season. Nebraska will be within two wins of the school's all-time record of 36 consecutive victories, set in 1976, and in sight of the all-time Division I record of 44 straight wins owned by Penn State.

Only four teams in NCAA history have ever won back-to-back championships, and no team has ever won three titles in a row.

None of that, however, was on the minds of celebrating Huskers who were greeted by more than a thousand cheering fans upon their return to Lincoln.

This season, Nebraska played nine of the teams ranked in the season's final top 25. Tentatively, the Huskers already have non-conference matches in 2001 lined up against No. 7 UCLA, No. 9 UC-Santa Barbara, No. 14 Long Beach State, No. 19 Stanford and No. 21 Notre Dame.

Nebraska, too, will be invited to play in the preseason State Farm Women's Volleyball Classic against two more ranked teams.

"I don't mind the competition level," Cook said. "We'll have the team to handle it."

No question about it. ■



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# Solid December Helps Huskers

## Nebraska Commitments for 2001

Player	Hometown (school)	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
Titus Adams	Omaha (Creighton Prep), Neb.	6-4	275	DT
Phillip Bland	Boulder (Fairview), Colo.	6-0	202	S
Clifford Brye	Hutchinson (Kan.) Comm. College	5-9	175	DB/WR
Seppo Evwaraye	Laurel (Laurel-Concord), Neb.	6-5	323	OL/DL
Antwon Guidry	San Jose (Leigh), Calif.	6-1	190	RB/DB
Jared Helming	Springfield (Kickapoo), Mo.	6-4	270	DT
Hakim Hill	Iowa City, Iowa	6-0	190	RB/DB
Richie Incognito	Glendale (Mountain View), Ariz.	6-4	285	OL
Randy Landingham	Sonora, Calif.	6-0	182	DB
Mike McLaughlin	Omaha (Millard North), Neb.	6-1	175	QB
Gary Pike	Pueblo (Centennial), Colo.	6-5	275	OL
Cory Ross	Denver (Thomas Jefferson), Colo.	5-9	182	RB/DB
Barrett Ruud	Lincoln (Southeast), Neb.	6-2	220	LB
Mike Stuntz	Council Bluffs (St. Albert), Iowa	6-2	180	QB

*NU continues to add recruits for secondary*

**By James Hale**

**T**his has been a strange year for Nebraska football recruiting. Normally, the Cornhuskers would have 90 percent of their recruiting class already committed. They would have at least two players who have already signed and

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enrolled on campus. And they still would have 10 of the top 100 players in the country very interested in their program.

This year, Nebraska seemed stuck on eight commitments from September until the end of November, and while the Huskers are still involved with a number of the elite athletes in the country, it's safe to say they are not as involved on as many as in past years.

However, that doesn't mean that Nebraska won't sign a great recruiting class, and it doesn't mean they can't finish strong. In fact, there are already signs that the Huskers have shaken off their mid-recruiting slump.

The month of December was kind to Nebraska to the tune of six oral commitments, and Nebraska re-confirmed a commitment with one of its top prospects.

Back in November, Cory Ross (5-foot-9, 182 pounds with 4.4 speed in the 40-yard dash) of Denver (Thomas Jefferson), Colo., said that he wanted to take another visit or two just to make sure he was making the right decision in Nebraska. When an athlete is still taking visits, he isn't really committed, and it took an in-home visit from a Nebraska assistant to get Ross back on track.

"I am totally committed to Nebraska at this point," Ross said. "When I committed to Nebraska, at first I thought that I should take another visit, maybe to Colorado, just to make sure. Later Coach (Ron) Brown came into my home and I talked to Coach (Frank) Solich, and they were pretty much up front with me about my playing opportunities and the education program at Nebraska.

"Nebraska is going to give me a shot at running back, which is really where I want to play."

Ross played mostly at running back this year at Thomas Jefferson, rushing for 1,500 yards and 19 touchdowns. He also returned four punts for touchdowns, with a longest of 88 yards. Ross did play cornerback the first three games of the season and came up with three interceptions, but he concentrated on running back the rest of the season.

Nebraska is looking to reload at the safety position in the secondary, and Antwon Guidry (6-1, 190, 4.45) of San Jose (Leigh), Calif., is one of the top 100 players in California. A talented athlete, Guidry led Leigh to the California Division II championship game, where the Bulldogs lost 28-20.

Guidry played option quarterback and running back this past year, rushing for 1,809 yards and 27 touchdowns. He also completed 19 passes for 719 yards and 11 touchdowns. Throw in five kickoffs and three interception returns for scores, and 260 yards receiving, and you can see why Guidry wants to give offense a try at Nebraska.

"The Nebraska coaches told me that I would get every opportunity to play either running back or receiver, but I am open to the fact that I could wind up in the secondary," Guidry said. "It has always been a dream of mine to play at Nebraska, and I will do whatever the team wants me to do. I will play wherever they want me to play."

The last in-state gem finally fell to



Antwon Guidry

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Nebraska in Titus Adams (6-4, 275, 4.8) of Omaha (Creighton Prep).

Adams is regarded as one of the top defensive tackle prospects in the Big 12 area, after posting close to 100 tackles this season, including 37 solos, eight sacks, 15 quarterback hurries, four passes batted down, one caused fumble and one fumbled recovered. That

followed a junior year when he finished with 76 tackles and 10 sacks.

Adams thought about taking some visits, but decided the grass wasn't going to be greener out of state.

"I knew that Nebraska was where I wanted to play, but I thought I wanted to look around a little bit," Adams said. "I knew that Nebraska was the best

program, and it is also the best place for my family to come and watch me play."

Nebraska beat out Tennessee, Iowa State and Iowa for the services of Adams.

Phillip Bland (6-0, 202, 4.47) of Boulder (Fairview), Colorado is a strong safety type who is a tremendous athlete coming out of high school.

Despite playing most of the year with a cast to protect a broken hand, Bland managed to come up with 90 tackles, including 55 solos. He also managed to pick off two passes and knock down several others. For the three games without a cast, Bland was a dangerous wide receiver, hauling down five catches for 104 yards.

Despite offers from Notre Dame, Colorado, Kansas State and Colorado State, Nebraska offered Bland the best opportunities for success.

"Nebraska was the best fit for me, and I knew when I took my trip there," Bland said. "They want me to play strong safety or rover, and that is the position that best fits my style of play. The rover is where I really want to play, because I am really involved in stopping the run, which I like.

"Nebraska is just a total class act in how they go about their business. They don't mess with you; they give you the straight scoop in recruiting. I was dealing with great people."

Randy Lindingham (6-0, 182, 4.43) of Sonora, Calif., is a cornerback prospect who could also play free safety. Randy has a twin brother Rodney, and many felt they would sign together. However, in a bit of a shock, Rodney committed to Oregon State, splitting the twins apart.

"I know it is hard to believe, but what is going on with us is really the best situation for both us," Randy Lindingham said. "Nebraska doesn't have much depth at cornerback, while Rodney felt the same thing about playing safety for the Beavers. We haven't been apart much, but knew that might be a possibility in college."

Some schools recruited Randy to play running back, after he rushed for 1,400 yards this past season to raise his career totals to 3,500, but it's on defense where he is expected to shine.

"Teams didn't throw his way much, and he only had a couple of passes completed on him," Sonora Coach Robert Cendro said. "Most corners can run, but they are not as tall as Randy, and that allows him to be more physical at the line of scrimmage."

#### Recruiting Notes

## Sooners, Texas Build Numbers

**N**ebraska rivals Oklahoma and Texas are the Big 12 teams who are already close to filling their recruiting classes this year.

Many still believe that Texas has the top recruiting class in the country at this point.

At presstime, the Longhorns had 23 commitments to their credit, the latest coming from junior college All-America defensive tackle Paul Broussard (6-4, 310, 4.8) of Blinn (Texas) Junior College. However, it's a longshot that Broussard will ever play for the Longhorns. He will have to work throughout the summer to get eligible, and even then he will be pressed to make it.

Broussard's academic situation didn't stop him from being heavily recruited, as Arizona, Texas A&M and Louisiana State all worked hard in a losing effort.

The Longhorns are still recruiting some of the top athletes in Texas, making it apparent that they are going to oversign.

Oklahoma had 20 oral commitments and one junior college signee. Junior college All-America offensive lineman Clint Werth (6-3, 285, 4.9) of Garden City (Kan.) Community College has signed and will go through spring football with the Sooners.

OU desperately needed offensive linemen in this class, as they were left with only eight scholarship players heading into the spring.

Just as important for the Sooners was the commitment of Dominique Steamer (6-4, 295, 5.4) of Temple, Texas. Just two weeks ago, Steamer looked like a cinch for Texas A&M, but the Sooners won the national title and won the loyalty of Steamer as well.

— Nebraska is closer to getting a commitment from defensive tackle LeKevin Smith (6-4, 305, 5.0) of Macon (Stratford Academy), Ga., who visited Nebraska on Dec. 15.

"Nebraska is exactly what I thought in my mind a college football program should be," Smith said. "Lincoln is a college football town, and the whole community is behind that program. I loved the stadium and just what the program means to everybody in Nebraska.

"The players and I just gelled together, and they all seemed to have the same character that I had. I would say things look really good for Nebraska at this point."

— Wide receiver Lynzell Jackson (6-3, 195, 4.5) of Tempe, Ariz., is now taking a serious look at Nebraska. He had a visit set to Washington and is working to visit Nebraska and Arizona. Tennessee and USC also have offered scholarships, after Jackson caught 50 passes for 1,060 yards and eight touchdowns in just his first year of high school football.

— All-America offensive lineman Ben Wilkerson (6-4, 265, 4.8) of Hemphill, Texas, surprised many by committing to LSU. Wilkerson is considered the top pure center prospect in the country and picked the Tigers over year-long favorite Texas A&M and Tennessee. ■



Randy Landinham also considered the Oregon State, Washington and San Diego State.


Running back Hakim Hill (6-0, 190, 4.5) of Iowa City, Iowa, is regarded as one of the top ball carriers in the Big 12 region. He is the son of former NFL receiver J.D. Hill, and there is no question that he comes from a great gene pool. He has brothers who have played at Syracuse, Arizona State and Iowa.

Hill was outstanding this past year, when he rushed for 1,816 yards and 26 touchdowns. That followed a junior year when he rushed for 1,370 yards and 18 touchdowns.


"Nebraska is still one of the schools left who feature a tailback," Hill said. "I want to play for a school where the running back is the main man to move the offense. I feel I have that kind of ability and can be that guy at Nebraska."


Hill was arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol on New Year's Day, however, Nebraska still plans to honor its scholarship commitment to him.

Hill is also an outstanding wrestler, and the incident may cost him his season. ■



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# CROSSWORD

## ACROSS

- 2 Frank Solich seasons as head coach
- 7 NU's No. 56
- 8 All-Big 12 punter
- 10 First 2001 road opponent
- 12 NU's No. 48
- 13 NU backup quarterback
- 18 Chad Kelsay's younger brother
- 20 NU's leading scorer
- 21 All-America linebacker
- 22 NU defensive tackle from Canada
- 23 NU's bowl opponent
- 26 NU rush end coach
- 28 NU's No. 77
- 29 NU's leading receiver
- 30 No. 2 in career punt return yardage

## DOWN

- 1 Sporting News All-America guard
- 2 Grant Wistrom's younger brother
- 3 NU's leading rusher
- 4 Academic All-American
- 5 NU's No. 70
- 6 No. 2 in career receptions
- 9 NU I-back from Canada
- 11 No. 2 in career total offense
- 14 Michael Booker's younger brother
- 15 2001 opener
- 16 Set record for pass breakups
- 17 No. 2 in career pass breakups
- 19 Husker junior entering NFL Draft
- 24 NU's No. 34
- 25 Kicked winning field goal vs. Colorado
- 27 NU kickers coach



Answers in March issue

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## A Big Hole In The Middle

*Emotional Raiola becomes sixth Husker to leave early for NFL Draft*



**Mike BABCOCK**

ERIC CROUCH PROMISED to do his part to keep Dominic Raiola at Nebraska.

"There will be a lot of threats," Crouch told reporters with a laugh following the Cornhuskers' decisive Alamo Bowl game victory. "I'll threaten him a lot. He's a great player. I don't know exactly what he's going to do, but I'm going to do my lobbying to keep him around."

"He's a big part of this offense, a big part of this team, I know a player that helps me out a lot in the job that I do. Obviously, (he's) one of the best centers to ever play the game."

Obviously, Crouch got carried away in his praise of Raiola, which is understandable in the wake of Nebraska's 66-17 drubbing of Northwestern. The Cornhuskers were a bit giddy.

Crouch should have qualified his final assertion. Raiola is — and now was — one of the best centers to ever play at Nebraska. But beyond that, we'll just have to wait and see.

Anyway, to continue with Crouch's promise, he was asked how he, at 6-foot-1 and 205 pounds, intended to threaten Raiola, who is 6-foot-2 and 300 pounds.

"I'm going to need the team," Crouch replied to more laughter.

As it turned out, Crouch wasn't in any position to persuade Raiola to return for his senior season. He went home to Honolulu, Hawaii, the day after the Alamo Bowl game. And when he announced his decision, Crouch was in Birmingham, Ala., to undergo arthroscopic surgery.

Doctors repaired a small tear in Crouch's right shoulder, which means the Cornhusker quarterback will be limited in what he can do during spring practice for a second year in a row.

But at least Crouch will return in the fall, healthy it appears. Raiola, on the other hand, will be gone, preparing somewhere for his first season in the National Football League.

After struggling with his decision for the better part of a week, Raiola changed his plans, reversing the announcement he made at the final teleconference before the bowl in Lincoln.

"My pro career is in two years, after I finish up here," Raiola said in mid-December. "I just want to clear that up. I know there have been some rumors about that. I don't know how it got on the Internet. But it didn't come from my mouth. I just want to say that right now."

The week before the bowl game, however, rumors of Raiola's departure had resurfaced, prompting post-game questions regarding whether the All-America center would stay or go.

"I've talked to Dominic while we've been down here, and there's really nothing I can tell you on that," Coach Frank Solich said the morning after the game. "He and his family

will look at things. I think the potential is always there now for these kinds of things to happen.

"But you just take things day-by-day as they come, and you go from there."

Solich's words were hardly reassuring to Cornhusker fans.

And five days later, he had to issue a statement, saying, in part: "We are sorry to see Dominic go, but we wish him the best. I'm sure he will have a successful NFL career."

Considering the quality of players that have come through the program, Nebraska has probably been fortunate that more haven't left for the NFL before completing their eligibility.

Raiola will be the sixth. Tight end Johnny Mitchell was the first, leaving as a first-round pick of the New York Jets in the 1992 NFL draft, after his sophomore season.

Mitchell was followed by Derek Brown (1993), Calvin Jones (1994), Lawrence Phillips (1996) and Ahman Green (1998), all running backs and all after their junior seasons. Phillips was a first-round selection. Jones and Green went in the third round, Brown in the fourth.

Conventional wisdom is that an underclassman probably shouldn't leave for the NFL unless he's projected to be drafted early in the first round, say among the first 10 selections.

"If you're going to come out and be a third-round draft pick, (or) a second-round draft pick, and not make near the money you'd make if you were a first-round (pick), if you're one of 100 guys fighting for 50 jobs on a pro team and you're a little bit more expendable than you would be if you were a high first-round pick, I think you've got to consider those things," said Solich.

Raiola's father, Tony, told the Lincoln and Omaha newspapers that his research indicated that Dominic probably would be drafted in the late first round or early second round.

If Raiola were to return to Nebraska for one more season, he might well improve his draft status. Rush end Grant Wistrom and defensive tackle Jason Peter both returned for their senior seasons, after considering an early departure for the NFL, and were first-round picks.

The potential for injury can be a deterrent, however, and Raiola has done well enough in the classroom that he's likely to finish a degree at some point in the future.

Presumably, Raiola received good advice, not only from his father but also from Olin Kreutz, a friend from Honolulu who left Washington early as a third-round draft pick in 1998.

Kreutz is the starting center for the Chicago Bears.

An emotional Raiola made his announcement at a news conference in Honolulu, after an equally emotional telephone conversation with Solich earlier that day.

He'll be missed, no question. But he probably did the right thing. ■



**All-America center Dominic Raiola struggled with the decision.**



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